7.5

六畳間の侵略者!?

白銀の姫と青き騎士 第一章

健速
Takehaya

健速　たけはや

「あの日々をもういちど」(HJ文庫)で作家デビュー。こたつをしまおうかしまうまいか悩んでいるうちに四月になってしまった。どうせだからもう少し出したままにしておこうと決意した2011年の春。

ポコ

兵庫出身のイラストレーター。好物はやきそば。最近はカップやきそば+島唐辛子にハマり中。

カバーイラスト／ポコ　装丁／渡辺宏一

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HJ文庫

HOBBY JAPAN

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気づけば見知らぬ山の中。携帯も繋がらない大地で目覚めた孝太郎が途方に暮れていると、彼方より絹を裂くような悲鳴が響いてきた。駆けつけた孝太郎がそこで見た人物は——

「桜庭先輩っ!?」

果たしてクランと共に消え、そして帰ってきた孝太郎の身に何が起こっていたのか!?　その謎が明かされる六畳間の「伝説」、開幕です。

HOBBY JAPAN

武装した男達に取り巻かれていたのは——

「桜庭先輩っ!?」

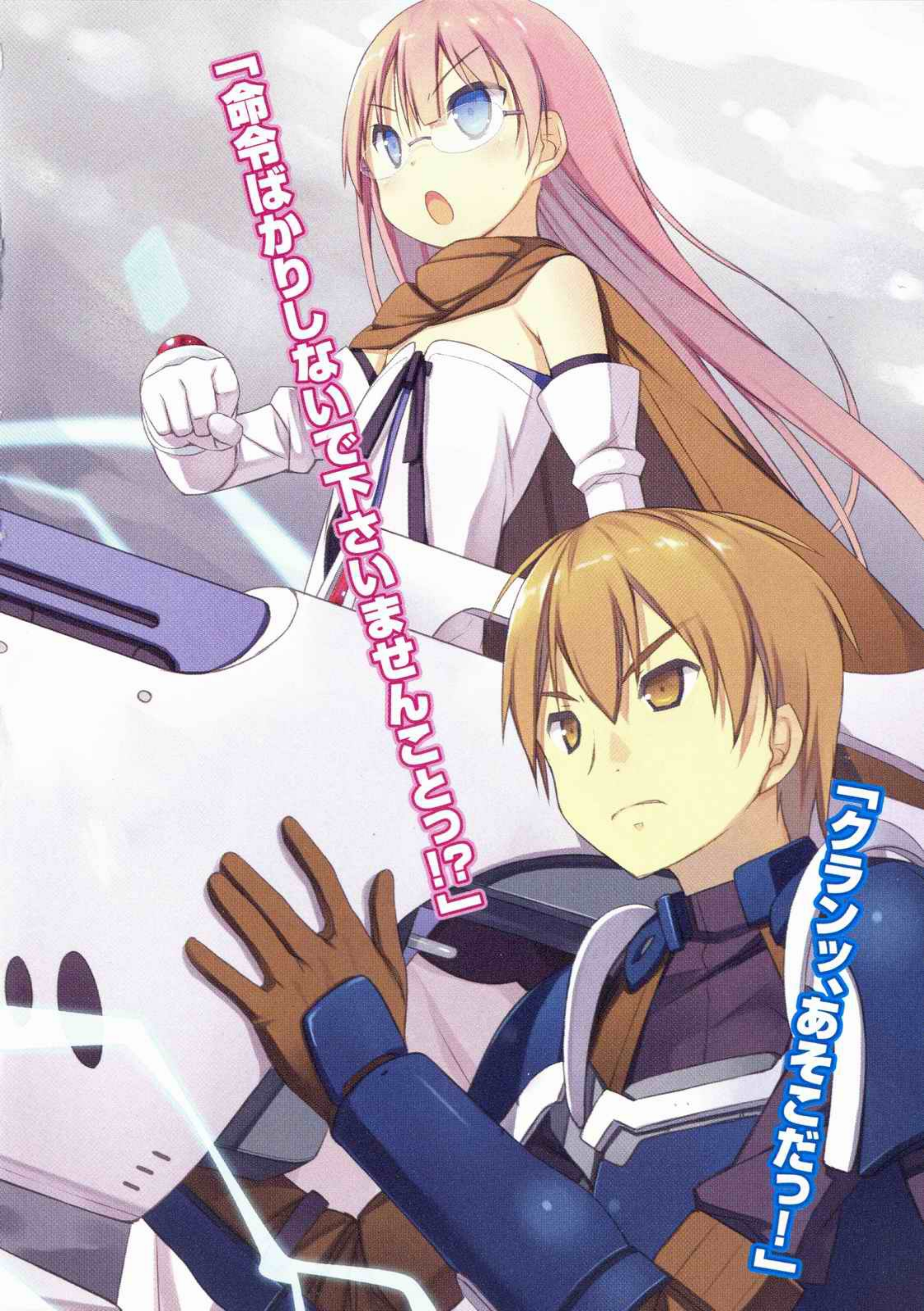
六畳間の侵略者!? 7.5

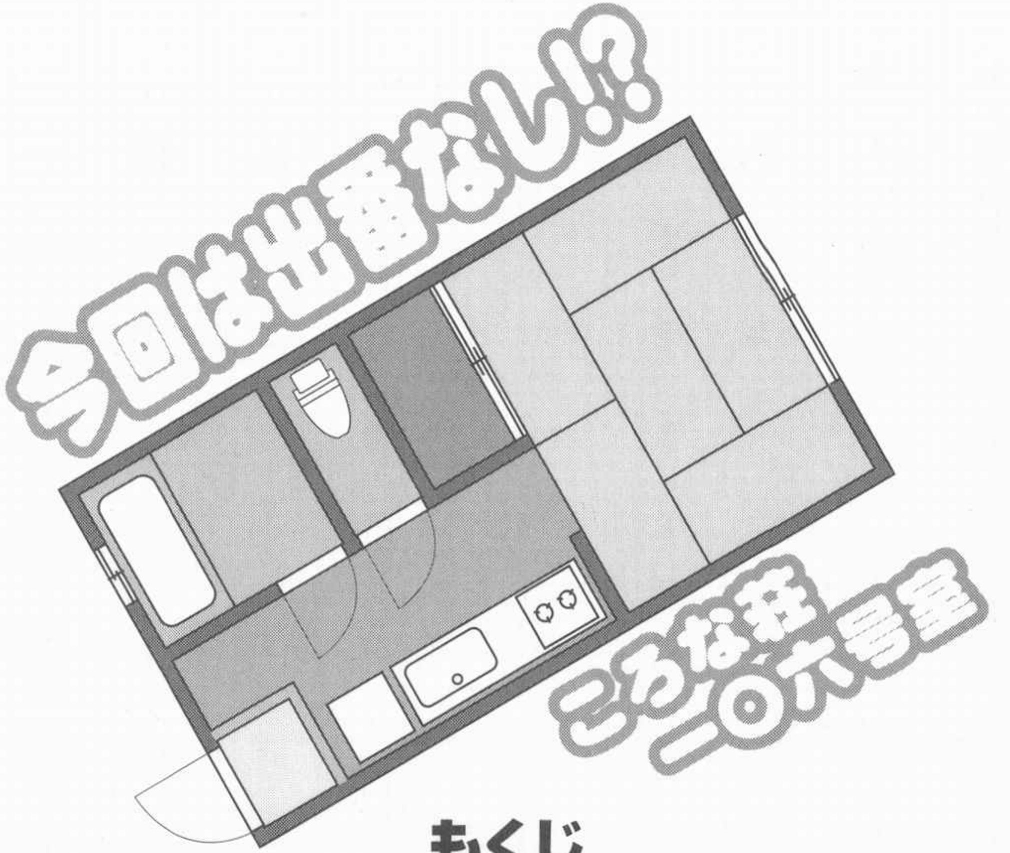
白銀の姫と青き騎士 第一章

「まさか……」
「お、おい、あれって……」

Snow
White and
the First Star

ここは何処!?
彼女たちは一体……？
謎が謎呼ぶ物語!!


「クランツ、あそこだっ！」
「命令ばかりしないで下さいませんこと！？」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Outside of Reason

Space and time flows in a similar fashion as to a river.

The river starts at a small source, and as the volume of water increased, flowing from heights to lows, it splits for one reason or another. At the same time, two split rivers might reunite once more. By repeating the cycle, the river spreads through the earth and moistens it.

Space and time are similar to that. At one point there was only one universe, but as time passed, it split into multiple universes. By flipping a coin, the universe could split simply by the outcome. If that coin was used to pick what team starts off in a football game, it could then possess the ability to largely influence said game. That split would then create a parallel universe. At the same time, it's possible for those split universes to rejoin. If that tossed coin had landed into a wishing well, the outcome wouldn't matter. The result would be buried by countless other coins and lose its meaning as it vanished into the quantum theory of probability. It is common for a universe to converge after a minute chance such as that, just like with a river. Even if a large rock blocked the flow, the river would just split up and reunite shortly thereafter. As the universe splits and reunites, history is knitted together. And we live in one of the strings of that knitted history.

Koutarou had been thrown out of that string.

The reason for that was the super space-time repulsion shell that Clan had been about to use. Knowing that it would cause a lot of damage, Koutarou split the shell in half and prevented it from being fired. But at that time, the energy stored in the warhead was unleashed. It detonated, and though it only was only a fraction of the effective area that Clan had designed, it was enough to swallow up her, her spaceship, the Cradle, and Koutarou, and threw them out of the universe.

Even worse, since the repulsion shell released its energy without any form of control, Koutarou and Clan were thrown out into the most problematic place of all.

They were at the beginning of the universe. If you were to compare it to a river, it would be considered the source.

The outside of the universe wasn't a place where something like a living creature could survive. No, not even material could exist. The laws of physics didn't even exist there, and to be precise, it couldn’t exactly be identified as a place. On top of that, Koutarou and Clan had been thrown to the beginning of the universe, where an unlimited amount universes and unlimited possibilities were being compressed. But at the same time, time was frozen. Although everything was possible, nothing could be done. Although it was the beginning, nothing was starting. It was the only exception in the giant, unlimited knitting of the universe.

The moment they arrived there, Koutarou and Clan were supposed to have been compressed into something smaller than even an elementary particle and then merged with the unlimited possibilities.

However, that didn't happen.

What saved them was the consciousness that existed there. Since that consciousness was the absolute ruler of that place, it sensed Koutarou and Clan's arrival ahead of time and protected them to keep them from vanishing the instant they appeared.

“What is...”

But what the consciousness first felt was a large sense of hesitation. Nothing but that consciousness existed in this place. That had always been the case, and always should have been the case. Here, space was compressed and time was frozen, so this was the first time this consciousness had ever felt the presence of someone else. So while it was greatly surprised, it was also greatly curious of Koutarou and Clan.

“Who is this boy...?”

The consciousness was particularly interested in Koutarou. What had arrived in this place were three objects; Koutarou, Clan and the Cradle. Amongst them, Koutarou held an extraordinary amount of possibility. If it was just a matter of energy, the Cradle easily had the largest amount, but the consciousness had been attracted by the unbelievably large amount of possibility that Koutarou held.

“Nothing but me can exist here... so why is this boy here...”

The consciousness bathed Koutarou with attention and examined his body and mind. An existence other than itself, an existence from somewhere else; there was nothing more interesting than that to the consciousness.

However, as its powers touched Koutarou to examine him, the consciousness hesitated again. The new hesitation was regarding the small abnormality that had occurred in itself.

“...Boy...? Why am I calling this object 'boy'?”

The consciousness realized the abnormality of calling Koutarou 'boy'. That wasn't a term that the consciousness itself had.

“No, more importantly, I? … That's right, I call myself I!”

And one more abnormality was the consciousness's self-awareness. Up until now it had never had a clear recognition of itself. Up until now it had been the only existence here, so there had been no need for differentiating between it. However alongside Koutarou and Clan's appearance, a need to differentiate itself between them occurred. Because of that, the consciousness gained a clear sense of self awareness.

“Recognition of myself is flowing from this boy!”

Contact with Koutarou brought along another change. As it came into contact with Koutarou's mind, recognition flowed from Koutarou's mind into it. The consciousness gained clear definitions of unclear things it had observed up until now.

“This boy has met me before in his past!!”

A white light appeared next to Koutarou. And the light then gradually grew larger, and once it had reached a sufficient size it began gathering to turn into some sort of shape. The gathering light's shape became clearer and clearer and finally became an entity.

“At that time, this is the appearance I had. That's why I have been given this form now...”

It was the appearance of a girl with calm and gentle eyes.

The light that had appeared next to Koutarou gathered and changed appearance into that of a girl. The consciousness’s contact with Koutarou had given it clear shape. And it didn't just stop with the appearance; the meeting with Koutarou had given the consciousness, no, the girl, self-awareness, awareness of time, space and even of language.

“The object's tag is Satomi Koutarou... I see, so you're called Koutarou...”

And she knew Koutarou. She could understand because of the change that had taken place in her body and mind.

“There are several descriptions in the ID... in terms of parameters, you seem to be a normal human, but you have an immensurable amount of possibilities...”

She was reading the very information that formed Koutarou. On top of the obvious weight and height, she could read his genetic data and what kind of life he's lived. Any and all information regarding Koutarou was flowing into her.

“However, the memory area is being protected... the me that Koutarou met in his past must have made it so his memory couldn't be read...”

However, a portion of that information had been encrypted and was not able to be read. In his memory was a large amount of information that the girl wanted to know, but she had no way of accessing it. However, she was able learn what she wanted to know the most of all-

“But, that's right... Eventually stars and life will fill even this empty place... I won't always be lonely...”

-and that was that she wouldn't always be alone.

Before Koutarou and Clan had appeared, she hadn't had a clear recognition of loneliness. However she could feel a vague pain as she was alone. Realizing that she would be always be alone from now on just as she had been before, that pain tormented her. In this place where time was frozen, it was hard to express just how long of a period that was. However, if one were to describe it in terms that humans could understand, it would be something akin to several hundred times a normal human’s lifespan.

That's why she was rejoiced at the information she had gained through Koutarou. At some point, the universe would be born. In it, stars would shine and life would prosper. It gave her hope that she wouldn't always be alone.

“...H-huh...?”

At that moment, Koutarou who had been unconscious all this time opened his eyes. Having woken up, he was unable to understand the situation he was in and blankly stared at his surroundings. Seeing that, the girl gently smiled at him.

“Koutarou.”

Drawn in by the voice, Koutarou turned towards the girl.

“You're...”

Hearing her voice and seeing her face, Koutarou was gripped by a mysterious feeling.

I know this girl...

That was a sense of intimacy with the girl in front of him. As if they had always lived together. It was very similar to the feelings Koutarou had regarding the invading girls.

But something's different... I don't know this girl...

However that was just as a feeling. Koutarou didn't have any memories of the girl. And that gave Koutarou strong doubts.

“Nice to meet you, Koutarou. But you've met me before.”

But when the girl spoke those words, a memory appeared in Koutarou's mind.

The dim underground, a stone pavement, several pillars surrounding a statue in the center. The girl had appeared as if overlapping with the statue.

What's this memory...?

They were fragment of his memory. The words the girl had whispered had summoned those memories from the depths of his mind.

“Guh...”

However, when trying to put those fragments together, a dull pain ran through Koutarou's head.

Who is this girl...? What am I forgetting...? And what's with this headache...?

He could remember seeing her, but he couldn't recall it. Whenever he tried to remember, his headache would get worse. If he had stopped trying to remember, the headache would definitely stop, but he felt it was something important, so he couldn't just do that.

“Don't try to force yourself to remember, Koutarou...”

The girl gave Koutarou a sympathetic look.

“Your memories are being locked away.”

The girl smiled gently and softly put her hand on Koutarou's forehead. Her hand was small, and she was slightly colder than him. The chilly feeling peeled Koutarou's mind of its search for memories.

“...Locked?”

“Yes. It's a complex lock that not even I could remove.”

Solving an encryption is overwhelmingly more difficult than creating it. And if the person that put that encryption in place was yourself from a different time, undoing the encryption was next to hopeless.

“Now sleep, Koutarou. You have someplace to go to...”

“Someplace to go to?”

An important notice had been put alongside Koutarou's information. It was a message she had written to herself from the future. It was information regarding where Koutarou had to go to.

“I'm sure someone is waiting for you there.”

As the girl said that, Koutarou's consciousness gradually grew faint. Another one of her powers was putting Koutarou to sleep. However, Koutarou didn't feel afraid; that was because the girl was gently smiling in front of him.

“...Why, are you crying...?”

As his consciousness faded, Koutarou noticed that the girl was crying. Although she was smiling, tears wet her cheeks.

“That is because I'm so happy to have met you. I had always been alone up until now.”

What had saved her from her eternal solitude was her meeting with Koutarou. There was no way to easily display that joy. Smiles or words alone wouldn't be enough.

“And because our parting is so sad. Because I'll be alone for a little while longer.”

There was someplace Koutarou had to go. There was something the girl had to remain and do. So because of that, until the universe was born, and stars and life formed, she would be alone for a while longer. That saddened her, to the point where tears were not enough.

“...If you're sad, you have to change things yourself, that's what my old man always said...”

“Fufufu, that's what I've just realized.”

As Koutarou's view faded to white, the girl wiped her tears away.”

Good...

Since the girl revealed a smile after wiping away her tears, Koutarou felt a slight relief. And as he relaxed, he was drawn in by the drowsiness. Koutarou chose not to struggle, but instead asked the girl one last question.

“Will... we meet again...?”

The gentle and warm, yet lonely girl, Koutarou couldn't help but want to meet her again.

“Yes, without fail.”

A happy voice responded.

“But when that time comes, will you want me to exist...?”

However her next words sounded uneasy.

Is she feeling lonely again?

Worried, Koutarou desperately endured his urge to sleep and told her.

“If I didn't... I wouldn't ask... if I would meet you... again...”

“...Thank you, Koutarou... let's meet again...”

That was Koutarou's limit.

Ah... I forgot to ask for her name...

Koutarou fell asleep with that as his last thought. Having made sure that Koutarou was asleep, the girl used her powers to envelop Koutarou, Clan and the Cradle in a bright light.

“Goodbye... let's meet once more, someday....”

The girl then sent Koutarou, Clan and the Cradle away from this place and to somewhere else. After staring where Koutarou had been for a while, the girl then put her hands together in front of her chest and closed her eyes.

“I hope the first star shines blue... just as Koutarou's armor...”

She then began knitting time and space.

All while dreaming of her meeting with Koutarou again, several billion years in the future.

Foreign Lands

Part 1

Koutarou woke up in the thick of a forest.

“W-What happened...”

After shaking his head a couple of times he stood up.

“Owowow.”

As he moved pain began running through his body, the injuries he had gotten while fighting Clan were hurting. But thanks to that pain, Koutarou woke up completely. While grimacing in pain, Koutarou checked for injuries on his body.

I thought it would be much worse, but this isn't that bad...

Koutarou remembered suffering from several beam and laser attacks in his last charge on the Cradle. However unlike his memory, he had suffered no serious injuries. Although it hurt when moving parts of his body, they were light bruises at worst.

“Right, that's it! Clan and the Cradle!”

However, Koutarou was more concerned about something else so he forgot about his unexpectedly light injuries.

“Where's that woman and spaceship!?”

Koutarou hurriedly looked around. Clan might still be targeting him so he couldn't let his guard down.

I'm inside a forest? No, I guess this is more like in the middle of a mountain....?

That was when first noticed his surroundings. An abundance of thick trees being shone up by the evening light and the ground was at a slight incline. Based on his surroundings, Koutarou realized he was in the middle of a mountain and that he was alone.

“I wonder where Harukaze high school is.”

Koutarou searched through his memories while looking around him again.

Let's see, a mountain forest near Harukaze high school...

The last memory Koutarou had was cutting through Clan's super-space-time repulsion shell with the sword he had borrowed from Theia. The next moment, he had woken up in the middle of this mountain. He felt like he had seen a dream while he was unconscious, but he couldn't clearly remember it, and he couldn't imagine it having anything to do with his current situation. Koutarou figured that he must have been blown to a nearby mountain because of the explosion from the repulsion shell.

“The closest forest was the one right above the school...”

Kitsushou Harukaze high school was positioned halfway up a small mountain. And further up was a forest that had gone untouched. Koutarou's work site was in that surrounding area. The next mountain was several kilometers away, and he couldn't imagine having been blown that far off.

“So all I have to do is get down from here and I'll be at school again.”

If this was the forest above the school, all Koutarou had to do was climb down the mountain. Even if he didn't know where exactly he was, he would eventually reach the road. Although he had been unconscious until evening, if he didn't return to school everyone would worry. With that in mind, Koutarou began his descent.

For each step he took, he bent grass and snapped twigs.

“Geez... this is all that woman's fault. Next time I see her I'll... wait... That's!?”

Shortly after Koutarou had begun climbing down the mountain, he spotted the face of the girl he was remembering by a rocky area. It was Clan, the girl that Koutarou wanted to meet for several reasons. In the open space next to her was her spaceship, the Cradle. The spaceship was on its side and revealing the belly of its hull to Koutarou.

“Clan! Us meeting here was the end of your luck!”

Since he had a lot he wanted to say, the moment Koutarou spotted Clan he hurriedly climbed down towards the rocky area. However as he did that, Clan remained motionless with her body lying on the rocks and her eyes closed.

“Hey, Clan!”

As Koutarou reached Clan he shouted at her.

“...”

“Eh?”

However, even then Clan wouldn't move. That was when Koutarou noticed something was off and brought his face close to hers and stared at her.

“...She's unconscious.”

Clan may have been unconscious, but her complexion was fine and she was still breathing steadily. She looked so relaxed that it didn't seem like her life was in danger.

“Hey, wake up Clan! Now's not the time to be asleep!”

Koutarou began shaking Clan awake with enough force that the glasses on her face almost fell off.

“Uh, uhh...”

But even then Clan didn't wake up. All she did was let out a painful sounding groan and draw her eyebrows together. It seemed that she wouldn't wake up merely by being shaken.

“Damn, no good...”

Based on Clan's response, Koutarou gave up on trying to wake her up. Even though she might have been an enemy, he couldn't just continue shaking someone in pain.

“Now then, what to do...”

Koutarou took his hands off of Clan and began thinking. With Clan unconscious here, he couldn't just leave her behind and go to school.

Right, I should make a call first.

After thinking for a moment, Koutarou pulled out his cellphone and turned on its power.

He had decided to contact someone related first. Since Clan was related to Theia, he had decided to call her first. By doing that he hoped that she would know what to do. With the spaceship lying around nearby as well, there was a lot that Koutarou couldn't decide on.

“Huh? That's weird.”

However when he turned on his phone, Koutarou noticed that it wasn't getting any signal. Seeing that, Koutarou shook his cellphone a couple of times. There was no way any place on the mountain where Harukaze high school was at would be unable to get reception. Since the school had been designated as a shelter in the case of emergencies, extra antennas had been put up near it. Even at the top of the mountain at Koutarou's work site, he would almost always have a maxed out signal. Despite that, he wasn't getting any signal now, so Koutarou figured it was more likely that his phone had broken.

“So it won't get fixed by shaking it, huh...”

No matter how many times he shook his cellphone he couldn’t get a signal. After sighing, he put the cellphone inside his armor.

“...Guess I have to bring her with me.”

Although he was worried about leaving the spaceship like this, he couldn't just leave Clan in her current state. So Koutarou carried Clan and began climbing down the slope again.

Even though he was carrying Clan, Koutarou's footsteps were light. Since the armor was powered, it moved in accordance to him. Because of that, it was essentially the armor carrying Clan; Koutarou couldn't feel her weight at all. So Koutarou had more room to check his surroundings.

“Still, what kind of tree is this?”

As Koutarou looked at his surroundings again, he noticed that the forest was strange. He had only now just realized that he had never seen any of the types of the trees in this forest.

Koutarou then turned his eyes down to his footing, and he couldn't remember seeing any grass growing there.

“What a strange forest...”

With his head tilted, Koutarou continued climbing down the slope. He couldn't find anything that he had seen before. He felt like he was seeing a CG forest in a movie. However, his surroundings felt far more realistic than a movie.

“To think someplace like this was so close to school...”

I’ll have to tell Sanae and Yurika later, they’ll love this...

While Koutarou was thinking about that, he could hear something as he had just reached the Cradle.

“Kuii, kuii.”

A large bird flew past Koutarou while crying. It must have been at least 30 centimeters large.

“W-What is that!?”

The moment he saw the bird, Koutarou's glance was fixed on it and his jaw dropped open. At first glance it seemed like a bird, but upon closer inspection, it was a reptile with the appearance of a bird.

“It looks like a lizard you'd fight in a game...”

It was almost like a monster that would appear in a game. That was an apt description of this flying reptile.

The reptile completely ignored Koutarou and continued flying. By spreading its large wings, it grabbed the air like a bird and flew far away in a short moment.

“Crap, I should have taken a picture.”

If he had found a new species, he would have earned bragging rights. Koutarou felt some regret about not taking a picture of it with the camera on his phone.

“Sheesh, all of this is her fault.”

Koutarou adjusted Clan's position as she was about to slip off his back. With his hands occupied with Clan, he couldn't possibly take a picture. So even if he spotted another one, he wouldn't be able to photograph it. That slightly irritated Koutarou.

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

At that moment, Koutarou heard a woman scream from afar.

“...What's that?”

Koutarou turned his head in the direction of the scream, and he could then hear other sounds, but not as well as the scream. And since the sound was getting absorbed by the forest, he couldn't even tell what kind of noise it was.

“Aaaaaa....”

Another scream. The voice seemed more desperate than before. Despite that, it wasn't as loud as before.

“Sounds like trouble. I should go take a look.”

Koutarou swiftly made up his mind and rushed towards the Cradle.

“Looks like this is the entrance...”

Koutarou approached a hatch on the Cradle and put his hand on a nearby lever.

As he pulled it, the hatch opened by sliding to the side. Past the hatch was a lustrous passage, similar as the ones onboard Theia's ship.

“Good!”

Relieved that the hatch opened, Koutarou laid Clan down in the passage. He then returned the lever to its original position to close the hatch.

“That solves the problem with Clan for now.”

Koutarou had put Clan onboard the Cradle to keep her safe. There were unknown animals, and he had just heard a scream. Carrying her unconscious body with him might be dangerous, but he couldn't just dump her off in the wilds. Leaving her inside the Cradle was the obvious conclusion he had reached.

“Next is... uhm... what'd Ruth call it...”

Koutarou turned back towards the direction he had heard a scream and began fiddling with the armor's right arm. The right arm of the armor functioned in the same way as Theia's and Ruth's bracelets.

“It was ‘maneuver suit, activate battle mode’, wasn't it?”

After Koutarou's faltering order, he began running much faster than he had before.

Part 2

The armor Koutarou was wearing had several different modes depending on the situation. Koutarou was primarily using cruise mode and battle mode.

Cruise mode was the most convenient setting. In this mode, frequently used functions and equipment were given priority and the computer performed calculations in accordance to that. By doing that, it efficiently supported the wearer. This was the mode Koutarou normally used, or rather was being made to use.

Battle mode has the opposite settings of cruise mode. Functions, equipment and calculations regarding combat were given priority. When compared to cruise mode, it has far more power and mobility, but at the same time, dexterity and comfort were inferior. Weapon usage, defensive measures and flight abilities were kept to this mode. They were all rarely used normally, but they were necessary in emergencies.

Koutarou was currently using the battle mode. Because of that, he was now running really fast. Gravity was being controlled to reduce his weight; on top of that, the powered armor increased his leg power. Because of that, Koutarou was running through the forest like a beast made for that purpose.

“The source of the sound has been located, my lord. There is a 94% probability to be 11 people there.”

“Where is it coming from?”

Koutarou's didn't slow down despite the report from the computer in the armor. He talked to the computer while moving his legs at the same speed. He also hadn't lost his breath; this was thanks to the armor's power assist.

“Forward, in the 1:30 direction.”

“That doesn't help me.”

“A little to the right.”

“Got it.”

Heeding the computer's instructions, he changed the direction he was running a little to the right. At the same time, two 3D images entered his sight. An upside down triangle that marked the sound’s origin, and an image of heat sources.

“That's very thorough.”

“Having you praise me is an honor.”

Koutarou adjusted his direction so that the upside down triangle was right in front of him and noted the heat sources being displayed around it. There seemed to still be a distance away as the heat sources were all clumped up. But based on the way the clump was moving, it seemed certain that someone was there.

“There is a 90% probability that ten of the heat sources are chasing after one.”

“Enough with the images! Let's go!”

“As you wish, my lord.”

After ordering for the images to be removed, Koutarou started running even faster.

It seems like I’ve come across an even bigger problem than I thought... Now then, what to do...

Koutarou was overwhelmingly faster than the eleven in question. Because of that, Koutarou didn't have much time to think.

A few seconds later, Koutarou had caught up to the group.

Well, I don’t know the circumstances...

But Koutarou didn't join up with the group right away, but rather hid in a nearby bush to watch over the situation. That was because he didn't know who had screamed or why.

The group was positioned by a vertical cliff, but Koutarou couldn't see the bottom of it from where he was. And since he couldn't see any trees from what he imagined grew at the bottom of said cliff, it must have been quite a drop.

“Hmm... they're surrounding the woman...?”

Koutarou squinted his eyes. The evening sun was level with the cliff, on the opposite side of where he was, making it hard for him to see. But it looked like a lone girl was being surrounded by the other ten men.

“To think you won't even scream or beg for your life in this situation...”

“If it's a scream you want, I gave you one earlier.”

“A scream of surprise from falling of your horse is hardly worth bragging about.”

“Then your desires won't be fulfilled.”

And they were talking about something.

It's not Japanese? What does this mean...?

But Koutarou couldn't understand what they were saying. He was sure they weren't speaking English, but he couldn't imagine what language this was. But even he could understand the tension in their words.

“The processed image is ready to be used.”

“Please bring it up.”

When Koutarou gave the computer the order, another 3D image appeared in his sight. It was an image of the scene in front of him, processed to remove the evening sun.

“What is...?”

The moment Koutarou saw that image, he was left perplexed.

The picture showed a girl in a dress surrounded by men wielding swords and spears. The outfits they were wearing felt familiar; they looked somewhat like the outfits Koutarou and the others were using in their play. They looked very similar to the clothes aristocrats and soldiers would wear.

“Is this a continuation of the play...? But why are they doing it in a place like this? They can't serve any guests here.”

Koutarou couldn't help but think of it as a continuation of the play in the back of the mountain Harukaze high school was on because of their outfits. But he couldn't understand why they were doing it here. Whether it was a performance or a rehearsal, he couldn't think of a reason for doing it on top of a cliff in the middle of a mountain.

At that moment, the evening sun vanished behind the cliff and Koutarou was finally able to see the faces of the people by the group that he couldn't see even with the processed image due to the strong sunlight.

“Sakuraba-senpai!?”

The face of the girl by the cliff looked just like Koutarou's senior, Sakuraba Harumi.

“N-No, that's not it!! That's not Sakuraba-senpai!!”

But Koutarou quickly realized that it wasn't Harumi. Based on the outfit and circumstances it would apt to think of it as her, but there was a fundamental difference, and that was the girl's hair color. Harumi's hair was black, but the girl on top of the cliff had silver colored hair. The splendid silver hair fluttered in the wind and was dyed orange by the settling evening sun.

"Alert. The weapons possessed by target B group all have the ability to cause injuries. Raising threat level from 1 to 2."

"They're real!?"

Koutarou's eyes opened wide in surprise after hearing the computer's warning.

"The probability is approximately 100%. The error in ability to confirm a weapon's ability to injure after 28 scans is next to 0."

The ten men were carrying a total of 28 weapons. The armor had used its sensors to examine each and every one of them. The armor had concluded that all of them were capable of letting blood. In other words, unless it had repeatedly failed 28 times in a row, the men were surrounding the girl with real weapons in hand.

"So what, this isn't a play... but is really just what it looks like!?"

Koutarou gradually understood the circumstances. It was a hard to believe coincidence, but a situation that resembled a play was occurring in front of his very eyes. There was no way a real weapon would be used for a play except for Koutarou's case, but even then there was a barrier placed on his sword.

So the previous scream was from her, and these guys were the ones that made her scream. And then they chased after her all the way to the edge of a cliff where they're now at a standstill!?

Koutarou understood the circumstances now as well, but he didn't know the reason for why this situation had occurred. It could be that the girl was an evil criminal and those men were here to capture her. Or it could be the other way around and the girl was being attacked by these villains.

What do I do!? Should I really just leave it like this!?

As Koutarou was thinking about what to do, the men's encirclement slowly shrunk. Meanwhile, the girl who had her back to the edge of a cliff stood frozen, unable to run any further.

“Looks like the long and prosperous royal bloodline ends here.”

“Blood has nothing to do with it. I only feel regret about not being able to protect the citizens.”

“A brave resolution. But don't worry, after the royal bloodline has been discontinued, his Excellency, the Minister will protect the people.”

“...The least I can do is hope for as much.”

The cliff crumbled slightly by the girl’s footstep. After taking a single step the girl closed her eyes. Falling or being cut, the girl was aware that she couldn't escape death.

“Information. Based on the situation, it is presumed that target B group's goal is the murder of target A.”

“They're trying to kill that girl!? Are you sure!?”

“There is a 92% probability of that being the case.”

Koutarou clenched his fist. Meanwhile, the men continued to close in on the girl. The girl in question could only grasp her hands in front of her chest as if to pray. The men were planning on killing her like that.

“Damn, I can't leave it like this!!”

Koutarou still didn't fully understand the situation, but if he did nothing, there was a high chance that the girl would be killed. He didn't have the time or ability to call for the police. To save the girl, Koutarou would have to go himself. And since the men definitely weren't the police, it was only right to stop them.

“Let's go! We'll stop that target B group or whatever and—”

“Setting B group as an enemy force in the IFF.”

However, what drove Koutarou to fight more than anything was that girl's face. Those eyes that held a powerful will, her sharp eyebrows, her firmly closed lips. She looked just like Harumi when she stood upon the stage. Koutarou couldn't just find it in him to abandon the girl; even if she was a criminal, he would certainly come help her.

“Select your weapons.”

“I want to go with my sword, but can you make it so it won't kill them?”

After jumping out from the bush, Koutarou ordered the computer to not kill the enemy. He still didn't understand the situation and he didn't want to kill either.

“As you wish, my lord. Coating the blade with sonic impact.”

Koutarou then pulled the sword from its sheath by his waist and charged at the ten men.

Part 3

“You guys! What kind of adults would do this to a lone girl!”

In order to turn the men's attention onto himself, Koutarou shouted loudly on purpose. And as he had hoped, the men's attention shifted from the girl to him.

“Who is that guy!?”

“What did he just say!?”

“It seems like he some kind of knight, based on the armor.”

“That doesn't matter! Kill anyone who gets in our way!”

The men turned towards Koutarou and readied their weapons. They prioritized killing Koutarou rather than the girl behind them, they were sure that the girl couldn't do anything anyways.

“I don't know what you're saying, but it seems like you want to do this...”

Already used to brawls, Koutarou could sense the men’s urge to fight. He then grabbed his sword with both hands. As he did, the sword began to faintly growl. The armor had covered it in a special barrier that created shockwaves.

“That person is...? Based on his stance it seems like he's a Forthorthe knight... but, why...?”

The girl was amazed by Koutarou's appearance. He was a savior that had shown up as she had prepared for the end. And she couldn't hide her surprise at the fact that it was a knight. Many bands of knights had already become her enemy, so she couldn't imagine that a knight would come save her.

“Ah...”

Before the girl's surprise had faded, Koutarou had taken action. His movements were swift. Despite wearing a heavy, Forthorthe-style armor, he moved faster than the men in light armor. Because of that, Koutarou was able to make the first move.

“Guaaaaaahhh!!”

Having closed the distance in an instant, Koutarou swung his sword coated with the special barrier and knocked one of the men out, sending him flying several meters. The man had no time to defend himself or be surprised.

“T-This guy's good!”

“Don't go at him one at time! Altogether!”

The men determined that Koutarou was dangerous after one of their allies had been defeated. The aware men then began to work together to take him down.

“That's one!”

“The next target is six o'clock.”

“Like I said, that doesn't help me!”

Koutarou spun around and swung his sword. As he did, the sword of one of the two men charging at him from behind came into contact with his.

Koutarou's sword broke the man's sword into pieces and sent him flying. The man then collided with the second man who was right behind him and was sent rolling a long ways.

“That's two and three!”

“Emergency alert! A pincer attack incoming!”

“That's much easier to understand!”

The fourth and fifth men attacked Koutarou at the same time while armed with a sword and spear respectively. Since the weapons had different ranges, it was tricky to deal with both at the same time. But Koutarou turned to the man with the sword without panicking.

“Fool!!”

“Are you even sane!?”

By doing that, the spear approached Koutarou's defenseless back. That assured the fourth and fifth men of their victory and they sneered at Koutarou.

“Look out, sir knight!!”

Seeing that, the girl who hadn't let out a scream until now did so. She wanted to help Koutarou.

“I'll leave that to you.”

“As you wish, my lord. Emergency deployment of the barrier.”

Several translucent white hexagon tiles appeared in a beautiful order. When the tip of the spear collided with the tiles, it bounced back.

“What!?”

“Impossible!”

The men's eyes opened wide in surprise. Koutarou didn't overlook the fact that they stopped dead in their tracks and swung his sword around in a circle, attacking the enemies to his front and back at the same time.

The two men were sent flying, leaving behind a sound similar to a cannon firing.

“A magician! This guy is using magic!”

“Magic!? That's not possible!! Can't you see the heavy armor he's wearing!?”

“You saw the spear being knocked back too, didn't you captain!? What else could that be but magic!?”

Seeing that, the men suddenly began reeling. They still had their weapons pointed at Koutarou, but they remained motionless.

“What's the matter, done already?”

With Saguratin in his right hand, Koutarou causally closed in on the men. The men were being driven to the cliff by Koutarou alone.

“I didn't hear anything about someone like this...”

“Damn, we should have brought our own magicians with us! We let our guard down thinking they were just women!”

“Quit your yapping. Let's jump him all at once!”

Leaving behind a single man by the girl, four men attacked Koutarou at once. They figured that they had no chance of winning attacking Koutarou with few numbers when he used such mysterious techniques.

“If this was just a fight that choice would have been the right one, but-”

“Deploying barrier.”

This time the hexagon tiles appeared in front of Koutarou. The barrier easily caught their weapons, and the men’s face distorted. Koutarou then swung his sword in a wide arc.

“-Unfortunately, your opponent is too strong.”

The hexagon tiles opened partially to make way for his sword. After the sword passed through them, the tiles repaired themselves. Only the tip of the sword struck the enemies outside of the barrier. It was a feat only made possibly by his large amount of training with wielding a sword with the armor. If the armor hadn't remembered Koutarou's movements, it wouldn't have been able to control the barrier this precisely.

“Releasing the sonic impact energy.”

“Don't kill them.”

“As you wish, my lord.”

After coming into contact with the third man, the armor's computer released the energy stored in the sword.

That energy turned into a powerful shockwave that assaulted the men. The men got caught up in it and were helplessly blown away. And through thorough control, the shockwave merely robbed the men of their consciousness.

“That makes nine.”

Koutarou grabbed his sword with both hands and pointed the tip towards the last man. Although the was still holding his weapon, his face was white with terror and it was obvious that he had lost the will to fight.

“D-Don't come any closer!”

“So, what are you going to do?”

Koutarou approached the man who had lost any will to fight and was now shaking. As if being pushed by Koutarou, the man stepped backwards. But they were by a cliff, and the man soon reached the edge and couldn't fall back any more.

“I'm telling you not to come any closer! You monster!”

“I don't know what you're saying, but that girl didn't scream like you.”

The man swung his sword towards Koutarou in an attempt to scare him, but that desperate act didn't stop Koutarou. Desperate to find something to save him, the man looked around him and quickly spotted the girl next to him.

“T-That's right, I'll use her!”

“What!?”

The man grabbed the girl and pointed the tip of his sword at her throat. When he did that, Koutarou finally stopped moving.

“If you value this woman's life throw your weapon away and raise your hands!”

“You can't, sir knight! If you relinquish your weapon you'll be killed too!”

“...A hostage, huh. Even though you were planning on killing her...”

Although he didn't understand what the man was saying, he understood the meaning of his actions. If Koutarou got any closer or tried use his weapon, the man would pierce the girl’s throat with his sword.

“Hurry and throw it away!”

“Okay, okay, I got it.”

“Sir knight!!”

Koutarou threw away Saguratin and raised his hands.

“Fufufu, how attentive of you.”

“Don't bother with me, please pick up your sword and fight!”

The man dragged the girl with him away from Koutarou. The girl struggled to break free, but she was unable to due to their difference in strength. Instead, the girl’s sorrowful voice filled the surroundings.

If he’d just come to kill me, there would still be something that could be done... but at this rate that girl will die...

Koutarou was planning on doing something if the man attacked him while he was unarmed. Instead, the man gradually walked further away from him. Koutarou was certain that the man would kill the girl once he reached the bushes. So Koutarou determined that if he was going to do something, now was the time.

I think Sanae did something like this...

Koutarou focused on his left arm still in the air. On his left hand was the gauntlet that he had borrowed from Kiriha. It was a weapon that used spiritual energy as ammunition. Since Sanae had used it through Koutarou's body, he had a vague understanding of how it worked.

Following Koutarou's will, the gauntlet began producing a powerful electromagnetic field. He didn't have as much spiritual energy as Sanae, but the field produced by the gauntlet gradually grew bigger. However, that wasn't a lightning bolt or a fireball, it was just an electromagnetic field, so no one but Koutarou knew what was happening. Neither the man nor the girl had noticed it.

Go!

After gathering enough energy, Koutarou reached the field towards the man. The field then got entangled with the man's sword, just as Koutarou had planned.

“What!?”

“Caught you!!”

When the man noticed that, it was already too late. Koutarou pulled on the sword caught in the field with all his might. As he did, the sword left the man's hand and got thrown into the air.

“That's impossible!?”

The man's eyes instinctively chased the sword fluttering in the sky.

“Eii!!”

Not missing her chance, the girl drove her elbow in the man's stomach with all her might.

“Guaaah!?”

Having completely dropped his guard, the man let go off the girl after receiving that blow. Having been freed, the girl hurriedly distanced herself from the man. The man reached out towards the girl with his hand, but at that time, Koutarou was already right in front of him.

“...You're better than I thought, lady.”

Koutarou's fist buried into the man's stomach. Having lost his breath from the girl's attack, the man completely lost his consciousness from Koutarou's following blow.

“And that makes ten.”

“The enemy force has been completely neutralized. Attention, because it is feared target B group will soon regain their consciousness, relocating would be advisable.”

“I know. Thanks for the help.”

“Exiting battle mode.”

“Good work.”

Having defeated the ten men, the armor's computer determined that the battle was over and ended the battle mode.

“Phew, looks like everything worked out...”

Part 4

The battle ended and silence returned to the surrounding area. Koutarou relaxed his body and slightly lowered his shoulders. Although he had an overwhelming advantage in power thanks to his armor, he would obviously get nervous and stiff when men were jumping to kill him. He was also relieved that no one had died. After all, Koutarou wasn't a main character from some game; he was just a normal boy.

“...Thank god.... looks like this person is a normal human too...”

The girl felt relieved as she stared at Koutarou's back. She was worried that Koutarou might not be human based on the way he fought.

“Silly... that's not possible...”

The girl smiled at herself and approached Koutarou.

“Sir knight!”

The girl called out to Koutarou as he was picking up Saguratin from the ground.

“Hmm?”

Hearing a voice next to him, Koutarou remembered the girl's existence. He was spacing out from relaxing after being released from the stress of fighting ten men.

“Ah, right... I was trying to save this girl.”

“Thank you for saving me, sir knight.”

The girl grabbed the hem of her dress and nodded to Koutarou. Koutarou figured that she was thanking him based on her actions. But he still couldn't understand what she was saying.

This is a problem... I still don't understand a word of what she's saying...

Koutarou returned a nod to the girl and scratched his head thinking about what to do now. That was when the armor's computer that had been silent for a while spoke.

“Language analysis is complete.”

Having returned to cruise mode, the processing power that had been prioritizing combat functions was returned to the general work functions. One of those functions happened to be language analysis. The computer had analyzed the words the girl and men had been using and had just now reached its result.

“Translation device set to ancient Forthorthe language.”

Based on the results, the translation device in the armor was put to work. Theia and Ruth used a similar device daily.

“Sorry for my late introduction, my name is—”

Thanks to that, Koutarou was finally able to understand the girl’s words. Her translated voice reminded him of Harumi.

“My name is Alaia Kua Forthorthe. Though embarrassing as I was just chased because of my position, but I am the first princess of this country, Forthorthe.”

The girl nervously presented herself in a resolute manner. She was grateful that Koutarou had saved her, but she didn't know who he was or why he had saved her.

“...Eh?”

However, Koutarou was so shocked by her name that he didn't notice her subtle feelings.

Having heard the girl's name, Koutarou was completely confused.

Did she say Alaia Kua Forthorthe?

Koutarou still thought this was a forest near Harukaze high school. Although the forest felt slightly out of place, he couldn't imagine this being anywhere but there. In that place, he had found a girl that looked just like Harumi wearing a dress that seemed similar to the outfits in their play, she had been chased by a group of men out to kill her, and she then called herself Alaia Kua Forthorthe.

Is it really an act? No, this is the back of the mountain, it's not a stage. And those guys were serious about killing her. But she named herself as the Silver Princess in the play? But this isn't Sakuraba-senpai?

It seemed like a play, but it wasn't. Despite that, the girl had called herself Alaia. The situation left Koutarou completely confused.

“I finally found you!”

At that moment, something hit Koutarou's head as he was at a loss.

“What are you doing here, you fake Blue Knight!! Don't move around on your own!”

It was Clan's fist. Koutarou had left her in the Cradle while she had been unconscious, but she had woken up and chased him down.

“That hurts you bastard, you still wanna fight!?”

Having been hit as his enemy, Clan, appeared, Koutarou recovered from his confusion and glared at her.

“This is no time to fight!”

However, Clan was saying that she had no intention of fighting. They had been fighting fiercely just a while ago, so Koutarou couldn't believe her right away.

“You're just trying to trick me, aren't you!? I won't fall for that!!”

“I just said there's no time for that!! We have to leave this place as quickly as possible or something terrible will happen!!”

Clan shook her head and desperately appealed with Koutarou. The eyes behind her shining glasses were serious.

Could it really be some serious trouble? Something that makes us have to forget about fighting...

Koutarou gradually swallowed the situation based on Clan's attitude. He hadn't forgotten that they were enemies, but it seemed like trouble had occurred that required them to put their differences aside. It didn't seem like her eyes were lying to him.

“Hurry and come, fake Blue Knight!! You're such trouble!!”

“H-Hey!”

Clan grabbed Koutarou's arm and forcibly pulled him towards the Cradle.

“Blue Knight...?”

The girl that had called herself Alaia followed the two with her eyes. She couldn't understand what Koutarou and Clan were saying. Clan was currently speaking in modern Forthorthe and followed what she was saying thanks to his translation device. So the only words that Alaia understood were Blue Knight.

By Blue Knight it would mean that he's some lord's vassal, but...

Alaia imagined what status Koutarou had based on the words Blue Knight.

The aristocrat system in Forthorthe was a warrior society, very similar to the samurai society of Japan. Even though he was a knight, it was very different from the knights of Britain.

The class system in imperial Forthorthe had the emperor at the top, and right below that were the royalty. Next were the high ranking knights that held regions. The high ranking knights governed the regions as lords and appointed lower class knights as vassals. The lower ranking knights served as the arms and legs of the high ranking knights and governed over various places in the region; in times of war the high ranking knights would serve as the leader of a band of knights. If compared to current age Japan, the high ranking knights would be prefectural governors and lower ranking knights would be mayors. In Forthorthe, high ranking knights were generally called holy knights and the lower ranking knights were called squires. Between those two ranks existed a large gap. Although the squires also governed over the lands, in reality it was the land of the holy knight. Moreover, the squires were on the bottom of classes of aristocrats; anyone below that was a general citizen.

By the way, the Pardomshiha family that Ruth is a part of is a holy knight family that holds a large amount of land, and she holds the highest title of Nye. Pardomshiha is a distinguished family amongst distinguished families; they're a prideful family that have protected the royal family since long ago.

And Fatra, the Blue Knight's title, was a common title amongst squires. A knight's title was determined by the one who decorated them. A specific, personal title was usually normally given to holy knights, but it was common for a squire to be given a title that corresponded to a color, plant or animal name selected by the lord they served. Amongst the names, colors seemed to be the most preferred by lords. They could color their armor by the same color, so it was the most preferred. So the words Blue Knight naturally led to imagining Koutarou being someone's squire.

When it comes to such a strong squire as him that hasn't become an enemy... It would have to be Pardomshiha or Wenranka. But I've met squires from Pardomshiha before and Wenranka don't use a color for titles... And it seems he's using magic too... Just who is that sir knight...?

Alaia understood Koutarou's title, but as a result she became even more doubtful. If Koutarou had the title of Blue Knight, there was a high chance he was an enemy based on the current situation. Despite that, he had saved her for some reason.

“Just wait, explain what's happening! I don't have a clue about what's going on!”

“Sheesh, guess I have to...”

Clan had disregarded him and hurried on at first, but since Koutarou was so persistent, she stopped after there was some distance between them and Alaia.

“You and I were just fighting. So how am I supposed to just obey when you tell me to come with you?”

“I understand. I'll explain, so I want you listen to me after you've heard the circumstances.”

“That depends on the explanation.”

“Really...”

Clan let out a small sigh and began explaining after glancing at Alaia behind Koutarou.

“...This isn't Earth.”

“What?”

“I said, this is not Earth!”

“This isn't Earth!? What's that supposed to mean!?”

Koutarou's eyes opened wide. It was hard to believe this wasn't Earth just because Clan had said so.

“Do you remember the weapon I was trying to use?”

“Yeah. That strange bomb, right?”

“That's right, the super-space-time repulsion shell. Because of that bomb, we were thrown to a different planet.”

Clan gestures an explosion with both hands.

We were thrown to a different planet!? Is that even possible!? I can’t b— No, thinking about it, it just might...!!

Koutarou couldn't believe Clan's words, but at the same time it rang a familiar bell. Strange scenery, plants he had never seen before, bizarre reptiles. He didn't even understand the words the girl and men were saying.

“On top of that, it seems we've gone back in time.”

“Back in time?”

Koutarou didn't understand the meaning of what Clan had said, so he stopped thinking and stared at her face.

“Yes. Simply put, it's a time slip[1]. We've travelled to a past age.”

“A time slip!?”

Even Koutarou had heard of the term time slip before in movies or games.

“T-Then, we got caught up in the explosion of your bomb and were sent to a different planet in a different time!?”

“I'm glad you understand.”

Clan let out a loud sigh after Koutarou finally understood.

“R-Really!?”

“Is there a reason for me to lie in this situation?”

“That's...”

Koutarou and Clan were enemies, so it was strange for her to suddenly want to stop the fight.

Which means, it's probably true...

After calming down, Koutarou determined that Clan was speaking the truth. That seemed more natural, and they were the words of royalty after all. A proper scheme would be one thing, but this seemed to be too cheap a lie to buy time.

“Anyways, this is all your fault.”

“Oh, but it's also yours.”

“Mine? Why?”

“The super-space-time repulsion shell is originally a weapon that opened a hole in time and space and its target was set to outside of space. Since you cut it in half, it activated before it was ready, and this is the result.”

“Hmph, if you're about to be killed it's only obvious you'd cut it.”

To Koutarou, lettings things happen would just end with him outside of the universe so it was only natural for him to cut it. He wasn't very accepting of having the responsibility shoved on him.

“And I'd rather use that than lose.”

“...Fine, I got it.”

Koutarou raised his hands and sighed. He realized that carrying on with this emotional argument wouldn't lead anywhere and asked Clan another question. It seemed like she wasn't interested in fighting for now, and it seemed to be an emergency.

“So, where are we and when?”

“This is Forthorthe. And this is about 2,000 years in past.”

Clan gave him a blunt answer, but hearing that made Koutarou's jaw drop.

“Forthorthe!? 2,000 years ago!?”

“Yes, that's right. I made sure, using the Cradle to observe the stars. This is Forthorthe 2,000 years in the past. I couldn't believe it at first either, but there's no mistaking it.”

Clan nodded with a smile when she saw Koutarou's surprise. She was happy that he had finally realized the urgency of the situation. She was relieved that they could now move onto what they had to do.

“That's how it is, so let's return to the Cradle and come up with a plan to return to the future. There's no need to risk changing the future by doing something unnecessary.”

“I see, so that's why...”

Koutarou had been surprised at first but he was now strangely satisfied as he nodded repeatedly.

“What?”

Noticing that, Clan curiously asked him, in response Koutarou pointed to the girl behind him.

“There's a girl there, right?”

“...There is.”

Clan followed Koutarou's finger and looked at the girl wearing a dress.

“I saved her as she was being attacked by some strange guys, but she called herself Alaia Kua Forthorthe.”

“Alaia Kua Forthorthe...?”

At that moment, Clan's jaw dropped.

“You s-s-saved her...?”

“She said she was being chased because of her position, so we're probably in the middle of that period.”

Ignoring Clan's reaction, Koutarou continued his explanation.

“There's been nothing but strange things happening since I woke up here, but now I finally understand. No wonder I hadn't seen anything like this, and it wasn't a play either... it finally makes sense.”

Having had all his questions answered, Koutarou repeatedly nodded with a refreshed expression. Not even 30 minutes had passed since Koutarou had woken up, but during that time he had been feeling impatient, so having questions felt really refreshing.

“W-Wait just a minute, fake Blue Knight!!”

“H-Hey, what now!?”

On the other hand, Clan didn't share his feelings. She grabbed onto Koutarou and almost broke into tears.

“Don't just light-heartedly change history!! What are you going to do if we can't return to our world!?”

“W-What are you so angry for? C-Calm down, Clan.”

Clan gripped Koutarou's armor with both hands and shook him. Koutarou tried to calm her down while shaking back and forth, but to no avail.

“As if I could calm down!! D-D-D-Do you have any idea of what you've done!?”

“What, I just saved a person in trouble.”

Koutarou couldn't find any problems in saving a girl 2,000 years in Forthorthe's past, but Clan did.

“Didn't I explain to you where we are!?”

“You did, Forthorthe, 2,000 years ago, right?”

“You don't understand a thing! Anything you do here will change Forthorthe's history!! At this rate we'll be unable to return to our own time and place!!”

“...What?”

Not being able to return to their own time and place was a big problem for Koutarou. There was something he had to do there.

“W-Wait, explain it so I can understand, Clan!”

Koutarou's expression changed to a more serious one. He hadn't fully understood what she had said, but he was starting to understand the seriousness of the situation he was in.

“The history that time and space weave is like the flow of a river! If we casually flow into a different river, we might not be able to return to the original river!”

Clan began explaining to Koutarou with a serious expression. Since this could be even more important than life and death, she was really serious. She had already forgotten about being enemies with Koutarou.

“A different river...?”

“That's right! In reality we've already entered a different flow! In the original history, someone else saved her, most likely the Blue Knight! But you just saved her! Which means what happens from now on will change!”

Koutarou began understanding what Clan was saying.

Saving Alaia from those ten men was the job of people of this period. Based on the situation, it was almost certainly the Blue Knight’s job. So even if Koutarou hadn't saved her, the Blue Knight would eventually swoop in and help. Despite that, Koutarou had saved her. Because of that the Blue Knight and Silver Princess lost their chance to meet.

“So I got in the way of the Blue Knight's and Silver Princess' meeting!?”

“That's right! At this rate history won't be able to recover!”

Clan nodded with her face turned blue. Since her skin was originally very white, it served to show just how seriously she was worried. Having understood how serious the situation was, Koutarou threw a question at Clan.

“Wait, what will happen at this rate!?”

“Like I said before, history is like the flow of a river! If we flow into a different river, a different past will be created! If we returned home in some way now, we'd return to a different world!”

The Blue Knight and Silver Princess didn't meet. So if Koutarou and Clan returned to the future now, they would return to a future with a history built upon the two never meeting. They would end up in a different world than the one they left.

“If the Blue Knight and Silver Princess don't meet, there's almost no chance of Forthorthe remaining as an empire for almost 2,000 years! And if that happens, Theiamillis-san and Pardomshiha won't come to Earth! So the time you spent with them will completely change!”

“So if we return to the future now, it'll be a world where I never meet Theia and Ruth-san!?”

As the explanation became more personal, Koutarou finally realized the position he was in. Having come the past, all of Koutarou's actions would change the future.

“That's right!!”

“That's terrible!!”

“That's what I said!! Do you have any idea of what you've done!?”

At this rate, Theia and Ruth won't be born, and Koutarou wouldn't meet them. And if they don't meet, almost everything since Koutarou enrolled in Harukaze high school would change. They wouldn't try to take over his room and there wouldn't be a mess at the sports festival. They wouldn't go to the sea and they wouldn't write manuscripts for a play. It wouldn't just affect Koutarou either. It would mean everything that happened up until now would be lost.

“What should we do!? How do we return to our own world!?”

Koutarou had something to do. If he returned to a different world, he wouldn't be able to do it. Koutarou had to return to his original time and place, no matter what.

“We have to find the real Blue Knight who has to be around here and make them meet! And as fast as possible!”

“Will that work!? Or would history change a little!?”

“It would be much better than now! We have to do what we can to raise our chances to return to our own world, all we can do after that is pray!”

While history could easily be split, it would often rejoin as well. If the split histories were almost identical, there was a high chance of them rejoining. For example, if someone went to the past and moved a grain of sand, that alone would be enough to change history. But because of the minute change, the split histories would shortly rejoin. As such there was a tolerance for change. Clan's goal was to find the Blue Knight and return to within the tolerant change.

“G-Got it. So what do we do specifically? What should I do?”

“That's right...”

Clan crossed her arms and began thinking. As she did she casually glanced at Koutarou's armor. The next moment, her eyes and expression began sparkling.

“That's right, I'll have you take the Blue Knight's place! Meanwhile I'll search for the real one and bring him here!”

The Silver Princess hadn't met with the Blue Knight. At this rate she would continue her travels defenseless. So Koutarou would stay with her to protect her until Clan found the real Blue Knight and they trade places. With that small adjustment to history they should be able to return to their own world.

“I only have to protect her, right?”

“That's right. And while pretending to be the Blue Knight. That's your forte, is it not?”

“Well that's true, but...”

Koutarou understood that Clan's plan was solid, but he couldn't hide his hesitation when it came to putting it into action.

Things have taken a strange turn...

For their performance, Koutarou ended up taking Kenji's place. And this time he had ended up taking the real Blue Knight's place. Of course, Koutarou was confused. It seemed like his several months of practicing would be useful in an unexpected way.

“Sir knight, what's the matter?”

That was when Alaia approached.

It sounded like they were talking about Forthorthe and Pardomshiha...

Alaia had been looking at Koutarou and Clan from a distance, but while the two were arguing she picked up a few words she could understand, and she became in interested in what the two were talking about.

In this age it would be... ancient Forthorthe...

Since Alaia had come up beside them, Clan sneakily activated her translation device.

“No, it's nothing, your highness.”

Koutarou responded in the same language as Alaia, what he was saying was translated through the translation device and entered Clan's ears.

“My servant and I were just talking about moving before the men I defeated wake up.”

“Servant!?”

However, the words that reached her ears were very displeasing. So Clan complained to Koutarou in a whisper.

“...What's servant supposed to mean!?”

“...What else would you be?”

“...Fine, guess it can't be avoided...”

Being called a servant was extremely displeasing to Clan. That said, she couldn't reveal her true position, and she couldn't come up with something more convincing than servant in this situation. So while dissatisfied, Clan obediently followed Koutarou's judgment.

“I see. It's true that we should hurry.”

Alaia nodded and looked behind her. There she saw ten unconscious men, some of them groaning slightly. It was obvious that they would open their eyes soon.

“I have to rejoin with my allies too.”

“I understand. Which way is it?”

Koutarou lightly nodded and indicated the forest behind her. He was ready to go as soon as she told him the direction.

“Eh...?”

Alaia showed a surprised expression.

“Will you travel with me, sir knight?”

“That's the plan. Is that a problem?”

“That's—”

Alaia hesitated to say.

She didn't know whether she could trust Koutarou or not yet. If he was an enemy, even her allies might be in danger.

I want to trust him... but there's the small chance those girls will be in danger...

She didn't want to distrust her savior, and she felt like she could personally believe Koutarou. She couldn't feel any evil intentions from his behavior or words. But her responsibilities and position she was in weakened her decision.

“Your highness, I can understand your hesitation. So let us at least move before those men open their eyes.”

Koutarou noticed Alaia's hesitation and lent a helping hand. But Koutarou hadn't noticed this on his own; instead, this is what had happened during last year’s play. So Koutarou imagined that Alaia might be hesitating.

“Move, is it...”

Koutarou had suggested to Alaia that they should move before the unconscious men woke up, but she didn't move right away. So in order for her to make up her mind, Alaia decided to ask him something. It was something that had been on her mind for a while now.

“...Before that, please tell me something, sir knight.”

“Anything you ask.”

“Why didn't you cut those men down?”

Alaia asked Koutarou why he hadn't killed the men. Regardless of whether he was her ally or foe, killing the men would have been better. If he was an enemy it would serve to fool Alaia. If he was an ally they would no longer be chased.

“That's—”

Koutarou wasn't sure what to say, that was a question that hadn't been in the manuscript. So Koutarou had to respond using his own words.

“I don't like cutting people down. And when I came to help I wasn't aware of who you were. So I couldn't just kill them without knowing who they were. That was my reasoning.”

Koutarou honestly answered the question. It wasn't something worth hiding, and he didn't want to betray the earnest look on Alaia's face.

I see... so this person is neither friend nor foe...

Having heard Koutarou's answer, Alaia felt embarrassed about her hasty self. She was so focused on whether Koutarou was an ally or enemy that she overlooked the possibility of him being neither. Koutarou had only jumped in to stop a fight in front of him.

...And there's something different about this person compared to the other knights...

Because of her position, Alaia had been acquainted with many knights. So she was well aware of what kind of people knights were. However, Koutarou's answer differed greatly from the knights she knew.

A knight not wanting to kill his enemies... thinking about just now...

Alaia recalled Koutarou's appearance after the battle had ended. At that time he had felt relief that no one had died. He had also neither boasted nor declared his victory.

He might be from one of the band of knights that have turned against me. But... but I want to believe in the mysterious something in this person...

So Alaia put her belief in that difference. She felt like believing in the blue knight who held a surprising amount of strength, but at the same time was strangely gentle.

"Please forgive me for my rudeness, sir knight. I will believe you."

Alaia gave Koutarou a smile full of gratitude and trust.

"I am honored, princess Alaia."

Hearing Alaia say, with a voice very similar to Harumi's, that she believed him, filled Koutarou with a warm, fuzzy feeling. He felt as Harumi herself was saying, even though that wasn't the case, Koutarou's heart danced.

"Sir knight, please let me hear your name."

"This was most rude of me. My name is—"

Satomi Koutarou, as he was about reply with that, Koutarou swallowed his words. He had another name he should respond with.

“My name is Reios Fatra Bertorion. I swear on this sword that I will definitely protect you.”

This was Koutarou and the Silver Princess's meeting.

The Golden Flower

Part 1

Having left the cliff, Koutarou and Clan were being guided by Alaia and were walking on a thin path in the forest. It was the road she had taken when chased by the men.

“Just a little further ahead is where I fell off my horse... the scream Reios-sama heard was most likely from then.”

“I see, so that's why.”

Koutarou was in the front. Right behind him was Alaia and a few meters after her was Clan, bringing up the rear.

“I'm glad you weren't hurt when you fell off your horse.”

“The surrounding growths cushioned my fall... I was lucky.”

“That must surely be divine protection from the goddess of dawn.”

“One can only hope.”

Koutarou and Alaia's steps were light.

“W-Wait up, Lord Bertorion, you're walking too f-fast!”

However, that wasn't the case for Clan in the back, as she was beginning to fall behind. Only a few minutes had passed since they had began walking, but she was already out of breath.

“That's unsightly, Clan.”

Koutarou stopped moving forward and walked back down the path he came from while sighing.

“Fufu.”

Alaia giggled and smiled at Koutarou as she walked towards Clan together with him. Seeing that smile, Koutarou felt bad. Although Clan was his enemy, it felt like she was an incompetent sister of his.

“You've only walked for a few minutes.”

“E-Even if you say that, this is my first time walking in this kind of place!”

Clan complained to Koutarou with a rough breath. Her face was flushed red and some sweat was running down her forehead.

The path Koutarou and the others were walking on was an animal trail in the middle of the forest. On top of that, there were a lot of ups and downs on the trail, so it was hard work for a princess like Clan. The more active princess Alaia was fine, but to Clan who was more of a thinker, it was almost unbearable.

When Koutarou got close, Clan turned off the translation device and complained to Koutarou in modern Forthorthe.

“It must be nice for you, since you're wearing that armor!”

Alongside Clan's words, the armor set the translating language to modern Forthorthe. With that, Alaia couldn't understand what they were talking about.

Clan had turned off her translation device because she didn't want Alaia to hear her whining. Since she was a Forthorthe born girl, she had a strong sense of admiration for the legendary Silver Princess. So she didn't want to show the Silver Princess her weak side. And since they were both Forthorthe princesses, she didn't want to lose. Those girly sides to her led to her turning off her translation device.

“Me aside, even princess Alaia is fine. And I'm sure Theia would be fine with this too.”

“I'd prefer you don't compare me to people of this age and the mountain bred Theiamillis-san!”

In this age where the only mode of transportation was a horse, the people here had more stamina than modern people. Theia would be fine because she had more stamina than Clan.

And Clan calling Theia mountain bred was deeply rooted in their families confrontation.

The Mastir family that had produced both Alaia and Theia held the mountain region to the north of the Forthorthe capital. On the other hand, the Schweiger family that Clan was from held more modern territory with a merchant town at its core. Because of that, the Schweiger family had a tendency of treating the Mastir family as country bums.

By the way, the Schweiger family was formed several generations after the Silver Princess's era. Because of that the family naturally gained territory with a developed city at its core. It was an obvious development since they were established after the Mastir family. Since the Mastir family was older, they treated the Schweiger family as newcomers.

With circumstances like that, Clan felt it was only obvious she didn't have stamina to match theirs.

“I can't take another step!”

Clan turned her face away with a spiteful attitude. At first glance it looked like she was just being selfish, but she did have an exhausted expression.

Now that I think about it, she must have walked all over the place looking for me...

Seeing that, Koutarou thought of a reason for why she was so tired, and lost his urge to complain.

“Can't you just fly?”

“And what will you do when Alaia-san sees that!? I can't let more strange things happen!”

“Even if you say that, that group might be chasing us.”

“That's because you didn't kill them! Take some responsibility!”

While Koutarou put his hands on his hips and sighed, Alaia asked Koutarou a question after watching over them for a while.

“What is Clan-sama saying?”

“She's saying that it's going to be hard to continue walking at this pace.”

Koutarou's translation device switched back to ancient Forthorthe alongside Alaia's words, and Clan quickly turned her own translation device back on.

“That is a problem...”

Alaia gave Clan a concerned look. Seemingly embarrassed, Clan turned away from her.

“Hmm...”

After thinking for a while, Koutarou showed Clan his back and squatted.

“Here.”

“What's this supposed to mean?”

“Get on my back. I'll carry you.”

Fortunately, carrying Clan was nothing for Koutarou's armor, even on a mountain road in poor condition. And since Koutarou was used to walking around with Sanae on his back, he didn’t mind carrying Clan.

“T-That's fine!”

Clan's face turned red and she shook her head. Unlike Koutarou, Clan was a girl of age, so having others see her get a piggyback ride was too embarrassing. And she also felt reluctant riding on the back of a man who was her enemy just a short while ago.

“Quit acting tough and get on. Now's not the time to be childish.”

“G-Guess it can't be helped...”

But after Koutarou said so one more time, Clan reluctantly leaned her body on Koutarou's back.

He’s got an armor on anyways...

Clan attempted persuading herself that it wasn't embarrassing because she wasn't directly touching Koutarou’s back.

“Fufufu.”

“...”

However, as Alaia laughed, Clan's embarrassment maxed out. She turned her face down and cursed Koutarou out of spite.

“Your back is too hard.”

“Just bear with it.”

“G-Guess it's unavoidable...”

“Fufu, fufufu.”

Alaia laughed even more. Having gotten even more embarrassed, Clan pressed her face against Koutarou's back and hid it from Alaia.

To think I doubted these people...

But this time, Alaia wasn't laughing at Clan. Watching over Koutarou and Clan's heartwarming argument, she laughed at her own doubts that they might have been enemies.

And this is the kind of person Reios-sama is...

At the same time, Alaia felt relieved. Up until now, she had only seen Koutarou fight and speak and act like a knight. While

Koutarou was talking with Clan, this was the first time Alaia had seen him act like his age.

It seems like he gets along well with his servant too...

What relieved Alaia the most was the way Koutarou treated Clan. They had called themselves Knight and servant, but she had never seen a knight carry his servant on his back up until now. And since Alaia herself had vassals as close as family, a sense of intimacy sprung up as she looked at the two.

“Fufufufu.”

She couldn't help but find her doubts funny. Along with her relief, Alaia laughed in a tone resembling bells.

“I have shown you a shameful appearance.”

“No, that's not true, Reios-sama. Now, let's go!”

Alaia began walking out in front, leaving a smile behind.

Even though she’s a legendary princess, she laughs like a normal girl...

That's what Koutarou felt when he saw her smile, and that it very closely resembled Harumi's own.

Since princess Alaia looks just like Sakuraba-senpai on stage, it makes sense for her smile to resemble Sakuraba-senpai’s, huh...

Koutarou looked at Alaia's back and slightly smiled himself.

“...What’s with that look? Don’t tell me you’re falling for her?”

Seeing that, Clan gave Koutarou a cold glance.

“I was just thinking that there's a big difference between you and princess Alaia, despite both being princesses.”

“W-What!?”

Koutarou followed Alaia with a cool expression. Since he dealt with Kiriha on a daily basis, Clan's words weren't enough to move him.

“Besides, why—”

“Calm down. There's something I want to ask you.”

“Huh?”

Clan was about to complain before Koutarou interrupted her. He then whispered so that only she would hear.

“...Can't you use your powers to find princess Alaia's allies? If we just aimlessly look for them, those guys really will catch up to us.”

Koutarou had also gotten closer to Clan because he wanted to consult her. Since he could talk to her without Alaia hearing, Clan tiring out worked out great for him.

“We're not the real Blue Knight and servant. If the situation is as you say it is, shouldn't we do something?”

That action would be unnecessary for the real Blue Knight, they were fated to safely group up with their allies. But since Koutarou and Clan weren't the real ones, there was a chance they were walking down a different path than the real Blue Knight. Or it could be that the real Blue Knight cut the men down. Those slight differences might be enough reason for the men to catch up to them.

“So that was your reason—”

“Half of it was. So, how about it?”

Clan pulled her expression together as she heard Koutarou's question.

“It's possible. I can send out the observation device from the Cradle and scan through the area.”

“Then please do so at once.”

“I understand. In return, I'll borrow your back for a while.”

Walking through a mountain path while using her bracelet to remotely control observation device was hard. Controlling them while she was leaning onto Koutarou's back was more efficient. While being shook on Koutarou's back, she quickly began fiddling with her bracelet and sent her observation device flying from the Cradle.

“Not a problem. You're heavier than Theia, but not heavy enough to pose a problem, thanks to the armor.”

“Quiet you, fake Blue Knight!! Take that back right now!! There's no way I'm heavier than Theiamillis-san!!”

But she immediately interrupted her controlling, and the observation device was left floating in the Forthorthe sky without a goal.

Part 2

Alaia was leading Koutarou and Clan to a small waterfall she and her allies had been before they were scattered. They had taken a short break there and she was hoping that they would all regroup there.

“I just hope they've all returned to that place...”

“There's no need to worry, princess Alaia.”

The sun had set and they were now relying on the light of lamps they borrowed from the men as they moved forward. The light was weak and unreliable. To Koutarou and Clan who were used to the brightness of the modern age, the forest seemed even darker than it was.

“Ooh.”

“Kyaa!?”

Because of that, there were several instances that they almost fell over. They had repeatedly been taught the dangers of walking in the mountain at night.

“Keep it together, I don't want to go down with you.”

“Sorry, sorry.”

Koutarou apologized to Clan on his back and whispered to her so that Alaia who was behind them wouldn't hear.

“...So what's up ahead, Clan?”

“...There is indeed a waterfall.”

Clan responded with a whisper as well. At the same time, she used Koutarou's back to control the observation device without Alaia seeing it.

“...There's a group of five people there.”

“...Do you know what group it is?”

“...Since the sun has set, I can't tell. But since the number of people matches Alaia's description, there's probably no doubt.”

“...Good work.”

If it was as Clan had said, Alaia would be able to safely reunite with her allies at the waterfall.

If we regroup, we should be within the history's tolerance...

But he couldn't let his guard down yet, and Koutarou asked Clan another question.

"...What about our followers?"

"...I sent out a second observation device to follow them, but it seems like they're heading away from here. It seems like they're taking the shortest route to the Mastir checkpoint."

By now, the men that Koutarou had knocked out had woken up. Having lost sight of Alaia, they for some reason gave up on searching and were heading north.

"...The Mastir checkpoint?"

"...It's a checkpoint between the borders of Forthorthe's capital, Fornorn and Mastir's territory."

The checkpoint was on the way to the Pardomshiha territory that Alaia and her group were heading to. The fastest way there was passing through Mastir territory to the north of the capital. It was a safe route. Since Alaia belonged to the Mastir family, no matter the circumstances she would always have a lot of allies there.

"...Rather than looking for princess Alaia that they've lost sight of, they've decided to beat her to the punch and get to the checkpoint before she gets there, huh."

"...They'll probably try to ambush on the road there."

There were plenty of roads to the Mastir checkpoint, but they gradually connected and at the end there were only a few. So the most efficient place for an ambush was where roads in this area merged together.

“...And they'll probably bring backup too, having seen your strength.”

“...Hm....”

I see, so that's how they're coming...

Even if they chased after Alaia as a group of ten, it would be useless if they were defeated by Koutarou. Instead it would be better to set up an ambush and call for backup. With enough numbers, no matter how strong Koutarou was, he would have a hard time defending Alaia.

While Koutarou was thinking, he could see a small light up front. Unlike an electric light, it wasn't a stable white light, but a wavering red one. It was most likely a bonfire.

“What's that?”

“Reios-sama, the waterfall is around there. I'm sure everyone is gathered there!”

Alaia's voice leaped. She was happy that she would be able to rejoin with her allies. She had also felt helpless because in the worst case, she would have to travel to Pardomshiha's territory alone.

“Let's hurry, princess.”

“Yes.”

Alaia passed by Koutarou and hurried forward. Alaia was normally less rash, but this time she acted before thinking. Grabbing the hems of her long skirt, she ran forward along the dark road.

“By the way, Clan.”

“What?”

“What would you prefer? Meeting the princess's allies while being carried, or walking on your own?”

“Let me down, right now!!”

“Yes, yes, as you wish.”

Koutarou and Clan ran after Alaia shortly thereafter.

Part 3

“Sister!”

“Your highness!”

“Alaia-sama!”

Noticing Alaia, the five girls by the bonfire all stood up and they all welcomed her.

“I'm glad you're all okay!”

With a large smile, Alaia joined the group.

“I'm glad you're safe!”

“We were worried when only the horse returned!”

“Your highness, I'm so glad!”

“I knew you were safe♪”

The girls all smiled and rejoiced that Alaia was safe. But the smallest and youngest, a blonde girl, showed her joy with actions as well as words. She ran up to Alaia and jumped at her.

“Welcome back, sister!”

“Charl!”

Alaia caught and hugged the flying girl. Since they always did this, Alaia didn't panic and strongly held onto the girl.

“I'm back. Charl...”

Alaia and Charl's silver and golden hair shone orange, dyed by the flame, at the same time the tears the two were shedding were being lit up as well. Of course, they weren't the only two crying. Tears were forming in the eyes of all the girls. It wasn't just because Alaia was royalty, but also because she was their friend or family. Which was why ever since the attack where they had been split up, they had all been worried sick.

“H-Hey, isn't that...”

“It can't...”

Koutarou and Clan watched over the six girls rejoicing in their reunion by the waterfall, though they were rejoicing like the girls, but had rather confused expressions.

“That's Theia, right?”

“Yes... she looks just like Theiamillis-san when she was a child...”

The blonde girl that Alaia was hugging, the girl she was calling Charl, looked just like Theia. But she wasn't exactly the spitting image of Theia; Charl was young, she most likely wasn't even ten years old yet. But even then, Charl's appearance perfectly matched with Clan's memories of a younger Theia.

“What an amazing coincidence...”

“It might not be a coincidence.”

“Why?”

“They are from the same lineage after all.”

Theia and Charl are from the same lineage of the Mastir family. It was somewhat inevitable that they would look similar.

“Oh yeah, now that you mention it.”

“Look, that Pardomshiha has some familiarity to her as well, no?”

“Oh, her hairstyle and stuff are different, but she's kinda looks like Ruth-san.”

One of the five girls was wearing knight armor. Her hairstyle, hair color, eye color and what she was wearing was all different, but she had a similar face to Ruth.

“That's probably the Pardomshiha in this age. The famous woman knight, Flairan.”

“Ah, right!”

That was when Koutarou realized that he already knew the names of the girls. Alaia and the others were all characters that appeared in the play.

“Princess Alaia, who are those two?”

The woman knight, Flairan, looked towards Koutarou and Clan. The girls had rejoiced in their reunion for a while, but now they had cooled off and paid attention to Koutarou and Clan who had accompanied Alaia.

“Flair, these two saved me.”

“Is that so.”

The woman called Flair by Alaia stepped forward to guard Alaia. She looked at them with a serious expression, trying to appraise them. Her powerful glance was saying that based on the circumstances, she just might cut them down.

“...Who are you?”

Flair put her hand on the handle of her sword while asking Koutarou that. The weapon she used wasn't a knight's sword like Koutarou's Saguratin, but it was thinner, closer to a saber or rapier. To make up for her feminine physique, she fought using a thin sword while aiming for weak spots.

“I'm Reios Fatra Bertorion. I'm a wandering knight on a training journey. And this is my servant, Clan.”

Koutarou carefully responded. The Blue Knight was a squire, and Flair was a holy knight. He responded like the Blue Knight in the play, though the part about Clan was ad-libbed. Knowing that he would be struck down if he said something careless, Koutarou was constantly serious and cautious.

“I am grateful that you saved her highness. But—”

“Flair, please stop. You mustn't be rude to my saviors.”

That was when Alaia grabbed Flair's arm and stopped her. But Flair couldn't back off right away.”

“But your highness, he's a man we know nothing about! He might have been sent to kill all of us!”

“If that was the case he would have already done so. That person, Reios-sama defeated the men that scattered us all on his own.”

Flair was trying to persuade Alaia, meanwhile, Alaia put her hands around Flair's hand grasping handle of her sword. Alaia was nowhere near as strong as Flair. By doing that, she still wouldn't be able to keep Flair from pulling her sword, but instead Flair let go of the handle. She was a knight that had sworn loyalty to the royal family. She decided to put her belief in Alaia's judgement.

“...I understand, your highness.”

“Thank you, Flair.”

After thanking Flair, Alaia then apologized to Koutarou.

“...I am sorry, Reios-sama.”

“Not at all. A wandering knight just happening upon that scene does sound too good to be true. It is only natural to be doubtful.”

Alaia had apologized, but Koutarou felt that Flair's reaction had been appropriate. Plays or movies aside, if something like that happened in reality, it was only obvious to be doubtful.

If anything, princess Alaia believing me is more amazing... But, I guess that's what makes her a legendary princess...

Therefore, Koutarou felt like Alaia was an amazing person. It also made him happy that she had believed him.

“As long as you are aware of that. If you try anything strange, I will cut you down on the spot.”

“That's fine.”

Koutarou then noticed one more thing.

If they hadn't been this careful, they probably wouldn't have been able to get this far...

He had noticed how difficult their journey up until now must have been. If all had gone as plays or history said, they had endured hardship after hardship before meeting with the Blue Knight. It wasn't hard to imagine that the only knight, Flair, had supported them during that time. The enemy was so large that she had no choice but to be this careful.

Looks like I should keep myself together. If I think I just need to follow a script, things won't go very well... This a desperate journey that will decide the fate of a country after all...

Seeing Flair's serious appearance, he decided to pull himself together after he had started relaxing as Alaia rejoined with her allies.

“Well then Reios-sama, allow me to reintroduce my friends.”

“Your highness, calling us friends is going too far...”

“Fufufu, it's fine isn't it. It's an emergency after all.”

Alaia smiled at Flair and began talking as she put her hand on Charl's head.

“This girl's name is Charl. More accurately, it's Charldrissa Daora Forthorthe, my sister and the second princess of this country.”

Having been introduced by Alaia, Charl looked up at Koutarou with her large eyes.

“Blue Knight or what it was.”

“Yes, princess Charl?”

Koutarou kneeled down in place. Kneeling, Koutarou's eyeline was slightly below Charl's. Doing that made it easier to talk to her, and he was no longer looking down on royalty.

“It seems you took care of my sister. Good work.”

“It was only a natural thing for a Forthorthe knight to do.”

Hearing Koutarou's answer, Charl's expression lit up. Her innocent smile warmed Koutarou's heart. It was the smile of an honest and energetic child.

“I like it, Blue Knight! Continue proving your loyalty!”

“Hah, as you wish, my princess.”

Smiling, Charl patted Koutarou on the shoulder a couple of times, walked around him and climbed up his back onto his shoulders.

“Stand, Blue Knight.”

“As you wish.”

Obeying Charl, Koutarou stood up and carried her small body.

“Oooh, it's so high!”

Riding on Koutarou's shoulder, she was higher than anyone else. That pleased her and her energetic smile grew even bigger.

I wonder if Theia was like this when she was a child...

Peeking at Charl's face, Koutarou thought of Theia and revealed a small smile.

“Fufu, oh Charl.”

“Your highness...”

Alaia smiled as she looked at Koutarou and Charl. Carrying Charl, Koutarou was smiling the same way he had when carrying Clan. That made Alaia happy.

I see, so this is what her highness believes in...

Looking at her master, Flair could faintly understand why Alaia had put her trust in Koutarou. And since Flair herself felt like she could believe in the same thing, her cautiousness around Koutarou slightly eased.

Not good... I can't let my guard down yet!

However she quickly pulled herself together again. Because of her position, she couldn't readily trust Koutarou. While carrying those complex feelings, Alaia introduced Koutarou to her.

“Reios-sama, she is Flair. She is my friend and a holy knight from the Pardomshiha that have served the royal family for ages.”

“Flairan Nye Pardomshiha. Nice to meet you.”

“Reios Fatra Bertorion. I apologize for my appearance.”

With Charl still on his shoulders, Koutarou presented his right hand. Because handshakes were a custom in Forthorthe as well, Flair grabbed his hand.

“Blue Knight, Blue Knight.”

“What is it?”

“Flair is diligent and stubborn. But she doesn't hate you as much as she says. Don't worry.”

“Hearing that puts me at ease. I might not end up being cut down.”

Koutarou and Charl laughed together.

“Princess Charl!”

“Leave the rest to me, Blue Knight!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Sensing that Flair was in a bad mood, Charl withdrew to Koutarou's back. As he played with Charl, it felt similar to when Koutarou did the same with Theia or Sanae, so it didn't feel like this was their first time meeting. Because of that, the distance between Koutarou and Charl shrunk, and after having just met they got very well along.

“Ahahahahaha.”

Looking at Koutarou and the others go back and forth, the girl wearing a more plain dress than the other girls began laughing.

“You can't beat princess Charl, Flairan-sama.”

The girl's friendly tone with Flair let Koutarou ease up a little. Noticing Koutarou's glance, she began introducing herself before Alaia could open her mouth.

“I'm Marietta Alsein, a maid from the imperial palace. So, Blue Knight-sama which of the girls here is your type? Is it Alaia-sama after all!?”

That girl's, Mary's, rapid self-introduction reminded Koutarou of someone on Earth.

This girl is like landlord-san...

Although they didn't look very similar, her gossip loving side and being easy to talk to, reminded Koutarou of Shizuka. But it might simply be because she was a girl of age.

“Mary, asking Reios-sama that is rude.”

“Ahahaha, you won't get angry, right Reios-sama?”

“I guess so.”

“See.”

“That's not it. It's only natural for Reios-sama to respond like that because you're our maid.”

Even though this is ancient Forthorthe, they’re all normal girls...

While thinking that, Koutarou looked at the girls faces again. Alaia, Charl, Flair and Mary; they all had unique personalities, but to Koutarou they were well within the limit of normal girls. That was because of his daily life with the invader girls, but Koutarou had no self-awareness of that.

Two more...

Koutarou then looked at the two girls that hadn't been introduced yet.

One had long hair and sharp eyes. She was wearing something more flashy than Mary, but it could be called a stylish attire. Together with her figure, she gave off the impression of an intelligent person.

The other girl was wearing an outfit that had a very different feel to it. She was wearing a long white robe and had a star shaped pendant hanging down her neck. She looked less like an aristocrat and more like a clergy from the church. Her face had minute childish features, and combined with her outfit, she gave of a very friendly impression.

“Ah, did those two catch your attention? That's unexpected.”

Noticing that Koutarou was looking at the other two girls, Mary began talking about the two in a rapid fashion.

“Those two are Lidith Maxfern-sama and Fauna Mordraw-sama. Lidith-sama is a famed scholar at that young age. Fauna-sama is a priestess that serves the goddess of dawn and was a classmate when Alaia-sama went to seminars.”

Even though she wasn't talking about herself, Marietta boasted about the two. After being introduced, the two greeted Koutarou.

“I am Lidith Maxfern. Pleased to meet you.”

“I'm Fauna Mordraw. Thank you for saving Alaia-sama!”

Their greetings were polite and friendly. That wasn't just because of their personality but also because of their respective professions.

“Nice to meet you two.”

Koutarou responded with a nod while thinking about Alaia and her group.

Hmm, an intelligent girl and a mysterious girl, huh...

Charl looked just like Theia when she was a child. Flair looked similar to Ruth. Mary, Lidith and Fauna didn't look like anyone, but thinking of the gossip loving, intelligence and mystery feel that the girls gave off, they seemed similar to Shizuka, Kiriha and Sanae. Thinking like that, Koutarou felt like Alaia's allies were similar to the girls related to room 106.

“This feels like a group I've seen before.”

“I guess you could call it synchronicity.”

Clan got the same impression and agreed with Koutarou's muttering. Ever since her defeat in November, she had constantly been observing room 106, so she had a good grasp of the personalities of the people there.

“Synchro-what?”

“Synchronicity. Even though it's supposedly unrelated, as if guided by fate, similar people or events will appear and occur.”

“But that wouldn't really apply here because there are people connected by the same bloodline, right?”

“That's true. Then it might just be a coincidence.”

Clan determined it to be a coincidence. Koutarou felt the same way. If this was fate or synchronicity, he felt like though everyone was together, they would look just the same.

Everyone?

However, that was when Koutarou noticed that one was missing. Theia, Ruth, Shizuka, Kiriha and Sanae, there was one more related to room 106.

“Yurika's not here...”

The group of girls reminded him of the people related to room 106. But he couldn't see a girl that corresponded to Yurika.

“...Well, I guess that would be like her...”

Koutarou smiled wryly.

Yurika was generally unfortunate, so her not being here would be just like her.

“What's wrong, Blue Knight.”

“No, everyone just reminded me of my friends in my hometown.”

“I see. Do you love them?”

“Yes.”

Koutarou obediently nodded.

That's right... right now my answer is 'yes'...

Koutarou was a little surprised that he could nod at that question. And his urge to return home grew even stronger.

“More than me?”

“Of course I admire you, princess Charl.”

In reality, Koutarou loved the friends in his 'hometown' more than Charl who he had just met. But he would feel bad telling the young Charl that, so he made an adult decision and said that he loved her more.

“Well said, Blue Knight! Let me praise you!”

Still riding on Koutarou's back, Charl cackled. Seeing that face when he casually glanced at her, he noticed a horse in the corner of his eye. That was Alaia's horse, and after she had fallen down it had come back on its own accord.

A horse, a horse is it...

Koutarou stared at the horse.

Although it was a horse, it looked slightly different than one from Earth. The body was similar, but it had a horn and its mane and hooves were different. Horses on Forthorthe looked very similar to Earth's legendary unicorns.

Then the horse stirred and moved its body as if to escape Koutarou's glance. Its gestures were quite distinct.

“It couldn't be... right?”

“What is it, Blue Knight?”

“That horse...”

“What about the horse?”

That horse looks just like Yurika.

Swallowing the continuation of his sentence, Koutarou approached the horse with Charl still on his back.

“This horse is my sister’s. It's very smart, even though it got separated with my sister it came back on its own.”

“...If we got separated from Yurika, she'd get lost and wouldn't be able to come back.”

“Did you say something?”

“This horse has very nice looking hair.”

“Right, right?”

Charl strengthened her grip around Koutarou and cheerfully boasted. Since Charl and Alaia would often ride on the horse together, it was her favorite.

“*neigh*”

When Koutarou approached, the horse neighed and turned its face away. Seeing that, Koutarou's conviction was strengthened even further.

Yurika... as always you have no luck whatsoever...

To Koutarou, the horse turning its face away like that seemed just like when Yurika was acting as a horse's rear and had failed to do something.

“No matter how good your act is, a horse is just too much...”

Koutarou muttered while looking at the horse. The other girls all had something similar to them, but only Yurika was a horse. Koutarou couldn't help but pity Yurika's extremely bad luck.

However, on the contrary of Koutarou's feelings, something unexpected happened. Right after Koutarou's mumbling, the horse began running away at full speed as if trying to escape.

“What's going on? Nobody did anything.”

“Ah, look out!”

But night had already fallen and the darkness of night had settled. Shortly after running away at full speed, the horse tripped.

And then something even more unexpected happened. When the horse crashed into the ground, its body was wrapped in white smoke. After the smoke cleared, what was left wasn't a horse but a lone girl wearing a dark robe and holding a large cane.

“Yurika!?”

The costume was plain and the color was black. The cane was rough as if it had been carved from a tree branch. But her appearance was the same as Yurika's when she was cosplaying as a magical girl.

“A magician!? Your highness, get back!!”

“Yes.”

Koutarou was surprised that a girl like Yurika had appeared, but Flair's reaction was different. She quickly put herself between the girl and Alaia and warned the group.

“It's an enemy spy! Bertorion, I'll leave her highness and the others to you!”

“I got it!”

Having heard the words enemy spy, Koutarou realized the sense of urgency. He had remembered that only her appearance was similar and that they were in danger.

“Clan, keep an eye on our surroundings!”

“I already am!!”

Flair dashed past Koutarou. After Koutarou had retreated back to Alaia, he let down Charl who was still on his back.

“Kuh!”

“As if you're getting away!”

The girl in black stood up and tried to run away, but the damage she had taken from crashing into the ground was large, and she couldn't move right away. Because of that, by the time she stood up, Flair was already right in front of her.

“Come, the winds-”

“You're too slow!”

The girl quickly pointed her staff towards Flair, but Flair's sword was even faster. Flair effortlessly pulled the sword out of its sheath and with a firm step, she knocked the staff away from the girls hand.

“That's enough!”

Flair's sword stopped at the girl’s throat. She was telling the girl that if she moved any further or spoke she would be killed. The girl stopped moving and interrupted herself mid-sentence.

“An enemy spy... and a magician...?”

For Koutarou, that was his second meeting with a real magician.

The masterminds behind the coup d'etat were Forthorthe's minister of finance, Maxfern and the head of the court magicians, Grevanas.

Forthorthe was a complete warrior society, so even if one had the ability, if they weren't a knight, they wouldn't gain a reputation. Not even the minister or the head of the court magicians were exempt from this. No matter how competent an individual they were, those who didn't stand on the frontlines and fought wouldn't gain any reputation. Disliking that system, Maxfern and Grevanas conspired to usurp the imperial throne.

At first they carefully planned. They made up a case that the country's money was being used up by the emperor, that the emperor prioritized giving land and assets to royalty. Using his position as a minister, Maxfern played tricks to make it look like the case was real and planted seeds of revolt in the hearts of the holy knights, and in reality, the assets flowed into the hands of Maxfern and Grevanas.

Their next scheme was to move the assets they had embezzled using the alchemists’ techniques to foreign countries and earn enormous amounts of money. It wasn't just the people blinded by the money, but the holy knights that Maxfern's tricks had sent into poverty had no choice but to accept the bribes for the sake of the management of their territories.

They then set up a trap for the loyal holy knights that wouldn't accept the bribes. Using injustice, revolt, murder and the likes, they used any method to put the guilt on the holy knights and reduce their numbers.

Having repeated that for over ten years, there was now a large amount of the band of knights who obeyed the minister Maxfern, leaving only a handful of band of knights loyal to the royal family. After deciding that traps would no longer be needed, Maxfern and Grevanas finally took action.

They uncovered a case that never happened and denounced the emperor. They then murdered the emperor and empress. They then put the guilt of the case and murder on Alaia and tried to have her arrested as a criminal in an attempt to get rid of the princess.

When the murder of the emperor took place Alaia was being visited by Fauna, her old classmate, and Flair and Charl joined as well. That was when Mary who had witnessed the murder of the emperor and empress burst into the room, starting Alaia's and the others escape.

Since Maxfern had already seized the palace, escape was incredibly difficult. However through the guidance of Maxfern's niece, Lidith, and some of the alchemists, they somehow succeeded. At this moment most of the alchemists already followed Maxfern, but there were still a few people that were loyal to the royal family.

Having escaped the palace, Alaia and her group decided to flee north to Pardomshiha territory. Pardomshiha had thick ties to royal family, and it was also Flair's birthplace. Alaia's plan was to flee there to gather her allies before coming back.

However, pursuers were right on their tail, so the journey was perilous from the start. Flair was their only capable combatant; the other five girls were frail and had never even held a weapon before. Despite that, their pursuers were the elites from Forthorthe's army and the court magicians. Their goal was capturing Alaia, and if that deemed difficult, her murder. Having gotten so close to the Mastir checkpoint while avoiding their pursuers was proof Flair's loyalty and hard work.

However, when there were only two mountain passes between Alaia and her group and the Mastir checkpoint, the pursuers finally caught up. Although they somehow escaped, they were all scattered.

And it was just then that Koutarou had met Alaia.

Part 4

“That was when Reios-sama appeared.”

“I see, so it was during such circumstances...”

Alaia's story more or less followed Theia's manuscript. Although minor details were different, the event happened almost as was described in the manuscript.

Koutarou stopped eating to think. The meal that Mary had prepared was delicious, but there were lots of things he had to think about.

Which means that after we get attacked by mountain bandits, we'll get to the checkpoint, but...

The red flame lit up Koutarou's face.

“If we keep pressing forward like this, we'll almost certainly get ambushed by the army...”

Koutarou sighed slightly.

He was currently concerned about the difference in the current situation and the manuscript that Theia had written. Thinking about it, in their current situation, the Blue Knight would end up fighting the army. But according to the manuscript, they were attacked by bandits. In the play, Yurika had played a bandit during that scene. After that was the famous checkpoint scene, so having to fight both bandits and the army didn't seem right.

Did Theia omit the fight with the army? Or is this because the history's changed...?

For some reason, the Blue Knight wasn't fighting the army, but mountain bandits. Because that wasn't very clear, Koutarou wasn't sure on how he should act from now.

“...Clan, what actually happened after this?”

Troubled, Koutarou whispered to Clan who was sitting next to him. However Clan shook her head and dropped her shoulders.

“...I'm not very informed about what happens here. I only know what happens in plays or movies.”

The Blue Knight was a legendary tale in Forthorthe, but Clan wasn't a historian so she only knew what the public knew. Theia might have known, but she was 2,000 years away.

“However, Bertorion, it would be reckless to continue forward knowing there's an ambush. And since a spy slipped in, it’s obvious there will be one.”

Flair pointed out the problems while pointing behind her. There was a magical girl in black tied to a tree by rope. She was currently struggling to escape her bonds, but because the restraint was strong she couldn't slip out.

If I told Yurika, she’d definitely be happy...

Surprisingly, the girl was an actual magician. Before they managed to bind her up, she had used several minor spells in resistance. But since her cane which improved her spells powers had been taken away from her, there was hardly any damage, but just knowing that magic existed was surprising to Koutarou and Clan. In the play, magicians appeared as well, but the two of them had just assumed that was fiction.

“Well, that girl could hardly have had a lot of chances to turn into a horse.”

Having lost sight of Alaia, she tracked down Charl and the others to observe them. After tracking them down, she continued acting like a horse while waiting for a chance to capture Alaia and pass information on to her allies. That's what Koutarou had come up with, and he didn't believe he could be wrong. In the end, the magician had misunderstood Koutarou's mumbling and assumed she had been found out, and ended up being captured. If that hadn't happened, it wasn't hard to imagine that Alaia's and the others journey would be over shortly. And for the same reason, after capturing the girl, the group moved away from the waterfall to somewhere in the middle of the forest.

“If we keep going, it's almost certain that we'll fall into the enemy's trap.”

“That's rough...”

Koutarou began thinking again after hearing Flair. Alaia's party mostly consisted of normal girls that couldn't fight. Koutarou's fighting capabilities were high thanks to his armor, but he had almost no experience. Clan wasn't much different from Koutarou. Because of that, the only proper soldier was Flair alone. So walking into an ambush by the Forthorthe army like that, it would be next to impossible to protect the girls.

“Lord Pardomshiha, isn't the only option we have to take a detour?”

That was when Clan broke her silence. Heeding to her role as a servant, she had left the talking to Koutarou, but she suddenly muscled her way into the conversation.

“Clan?”

“...I'll let you in on the details later.”

Koutarou was left confused about Clan's actions, but rather than answering his doubts, she continued speaking to Flair.

“If we take a detour from the road and cross the mountain, we won't come into contact with the army. There's the problem of it being hard to walk, but it’s better than walking into a trap.”

“Hmm... If we do it before they increase their search area after noticing that contact with their spy has been lost... it might be worth trying.”

Flair agreed with Clan and made up her mind.

“At daybreak tomorrow, we'll take a detour from the road and cross the mountain towards the Mastir checkpoint. Everyone rest easy for the night.”

As such, their actions for tomorrow were decided, and Alaia and her party rested for the moment.

To keep the fire from going out, Koutarou threw pieces of wood into the flame. The pieces shone brightly and popped repeatedly, and the fire grew slightly larger.

Although there was a chance that they would be found by the enemy the fire was needed to keep them from being attacked by animals in the forest, and to keep warm. Since Flair had picked a good spot, the fire was being covered by the surroundings, so the chances of being found were minimal.

“So how does it look?”

“Just wait a moment... uhm...”

Clan was sitting next to Koutarou. It was now past midnight. The only ones awake where those two and the rest were sleeping on the other side of the fire, covered by blankets.

Having decided on what to do tomorrow, Alaia and her party went to sleep to rest up. But they would take turns to keep watch on their surroundings and keep the fire alive. And just after midnight was Koutarou and Clan's turn.

“...It looks okay. There are no large animals or people in the area.”

Using her observation device, Clan watched over the surroundings. Fortunately there were no signs of danger, and she let out a small sigh of relief. The camp site that Flair had picked was still safe.

“I see. Thank you.”

“You're welcome.”

While responding to Koutarou, Clan couldn't help but think what a strange turn of events things had taken.

Of course the Blue Knight act is one thing, but to think I would be cooperating with this man...

Just half a day ago, Clan had franticly been trying to kill Koutarou. Through some twist of fate, they had been put in a situation where they had to work together. And now they're talk to one another in a friendly manner. To Clan, that was just too bizarre.

“By the way Clan, why'd you say that before?”

“That?”

Clan stopped thinking as she heard Koutarou's question. Since she had been thinking about something else, she couldn't answer him right away.

“You know, when you suggested to Flair-san that we should take a detour from the road.”

Since it was just the two of them, Koutarou could speak like normal. And he didn't call Flair Lord Pardomshiha. To Koutarou, Clan was currently the only one he could be himself with.

“Ah, right, about that.”

“That's right. I was sure you'd stay quiet to not change history.”

“It's the opposite Bertorion.”

The same was true for Clan and she dropped any formalities with Koutarou. Oddly enough, the two enemies could only reveal their true selves to one another.

“The opposite?”

“Yes. I realized what the Blue Knight would have done.”

Clan continued talking while Koutarou was perplexed.

“If we continued walking down the road, the army would ambush us. Thinking about it, there's no way they would just walk into it. So they would need to take a detour, either through the mountain or the river.”

Since they were currently in the middle of a mountain, they would either need to cross the river with a boat or leave the road and cross the mountains.

“So remember that the Blue Knight was attacked by mountain bandits.”

“I see! You're smart, Clan!”

Noticing what Clan was trying to say, Koutarou's expression brightened up.

“In other words, the Blue Knight walked off the beaten path and was attacked by mountain bandits.”

“That's why there wasn't a scene about fighting the army, but bandits!”

There were three options they had right now, continuing along the road, crossing the mountain or crossing the river. The only option that let them avoid the army but fight mountain bandits was by crossing the mountain.

“There will probably be fewer bandits than soldiers, and we'll stand out less in the mountains. I believed that was what the Blue Knight chose.”

“I see... Clan, I thought you were just sly and vengeful, but that's not all there is to you.”

Koutarou cheerfully slapped Clan on the back.

“Ow, that hurts!”

“Sorry, I got excited and put a little too much force in it.”

“And what's sly and vengeful supposed to mean!?”

“That's what Theia said, and I felt the same after meeting you.”

“Quit messing around!!”

Excited, Clan stood up.

“Don't you forget! When we get back to our age I'll have you hanged for offending royalty!”

“Your laws don't apply to me, I'm not a citizen of your country.”

“Then I'll just beat you to death!”

“I got it, just calm down, Clan.”

“Mhhh Hhhm!”

“Everyone's gonna wake up.”

With his left hand, Koutarou forcibly dragged Clan towards him and with his right he closed her mouth. Displeased, she struggled for a while, but as time passed she calmed down. When Koutarou confirmed that he removed his hands.

“Once we return you'll regret it.”

“If we return.”

Koutarou then looked up into the sky. Earth was on the other side of the sea of stars, 2,000 years away.

“If we can't return it'll just be the two of us.”

“I'll pass on that.”

“That goes for both of us.”

However, on the contrary to their words, they were happy that they weren't alone, even if they were with their enemy.

“It'll be because you did something unnecessary.”

“It can't be helped can it, I didn't know anything. Besides—”

As Koutarou was object, he saw someone wake up on the other side of the bonfire.

“What's wrong?”

“Looks like we woke someone up.”

Clan was wondering why Koutarou had stopped mid-sentence when Koutarou pointed to the other side of the fire, just as the person that had woken up was turning towards them.

“Princess Alaia.”

When they confirmed that it was Alaia, Koutarou and Clan hurriedly stood up, corrected their lazy postures and faced her as a knight and his servant.

“May I speak with you, Reios-sama?”

“Ah, y-yes, of course.”

“Thank you. Oh and please relax you two.”

With a small smile, Alaia approached. She had heard Koutarou and Clan talking for a while now, so for them to suddenly stop was funny. Having gotten up next to the fire, Alaia sat down near Koutarou.

“...Bertorion.”

Clan poked Koutarou with her elbow.

“...What?”

“...I'll leave Alaia to you. Meanwhile I'll keep an eye on our surroundings.”

“...Ah, that's playing dirty!”

Clan was planning on leaving this to Koutarou while she feigned ignorance. This was most likely because she didn't want to deal with Alaia, but also because there were no scenes where the Blue Knight's servant stood out. It wasn't even certain if a servant existed to begin with. There were no recordings regarding a servant. So in order to not change history, Clan left all dealings with Alaia to Koutarou, the Blue Knight stand in.

“Well then, your highness, Lord Bertorion, I will keep look around the area.”

“I'm sorry for making you worry, Clan-sama.”

“No, this is nothing. Besides, keeping a lookout of the area is necessary. In return, please keep Lord Bertorion company, princess Alaia.”

“Very well.”

“H-Hey...”

Leaving behind a smiling Alaia and panicking Koutarou, Clan quickly left the bonfire.

That bastard, she definitely won't come back until we're done talking...

Having been deserted, Koutarou decided that he would complain until Clan's ears bled when she came back.

“Reios-sama.”

While Koutarou was staring at Clan's back with complex feelings inside his chest, Alaia called out to him. When Koutarou turned to her, she tilted her head and giggled.

“Well...”

Dumbfounded, Koutarou sighed and sat back down.

“You seem to get along very well with Clan-sama.”

Alaia was smiling, but Koutarou lightly shook his head and denied it.

“We're just sort of forced together... you know, stuck in the same boat... not quite the same as getting along.”

They were originally enemies; if it wasn't for this situation, Koutarou and Clan would probably still be fighting.

“Fufu, is that, right?”

But that wasn't how Alaia saw it. In reality it might be just as Koutarou said, but others saw Koutarou and Clan as friendly to each other. Alaia had called it getting along because of what she had seen.

“So, what did you want to talk about?”

It was an embarrassing topic, and if she got too involved into it, it would become problematic, so Koutarou quickly changed topic.

“That's right..."

After revealing a lonely expression for an instant, she showed a serious expression. It was an expression that left a strong impression of her being a princess.

“Actually, I wanted say farewell to you and Clan-sama.”

Alaia quietly spoke those words. However, having heard that, Koutarou was unable to remain calm, unlike Alaia.

“Farewell!? What do you mean!?”

If they split up here, history would get completely rewritten. If that happened, Koutarou and Clan wouldn't be able to return home. That was a serious problem.

“It's just as I said. I can't involve you any further.”

“It's to keep me from getting involved!?”

In his surprise, Koutarou returned to his normal self.

Ah, this person really did only help with good intentions...

Seeing his reaction, Alaia reconfirmed that her judgment hadn't been wrong. And she quietly nodded.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“That's because, at this rate, the lord you serve will be blamed.”

“Lord!? My master will be blamed?”

“Yes.”

There was no master that Koutarou was serving. That calmed Koutarou down, and after a deep breath, he asked Alaia.

“Why do you think so?”

“That's because you are very strong. That much strength at your age must mean that you are part of a large band of knights.”

The quality of a squire was obviously higher in larger bands of knights. It influenced not just their skill with the sword, but also the quality of their sword and armor, and having magical tools was another indicator. So after seeing Koutarou fight, it was only natural to assume he was part of a large band of knights.

“And there are only two bands of knights that large that are my allies. Pardomshiha and Wenranka.”

There were only two large bands of knights that were still loyal to the royal family: Pardomshiha and Wenranka. Both had served the family for a long time, and because of their many assets, they didn't accept any of Maxfern's bribes.

“However, you are not part of either of them. If you were a squire from Pardomshiha we would have met before, and Wenranka don't use colors for their titles.”

Using aristocratic common knowledge, it was obvious that Reios Fatra Bertorion wasn't part of Pardomshiha or Wenranka. In other words—

“In other words, you serve a lord that follows Maxfern. If you continue allying with us, it is only obvious that blame will fall on your lord. Which means that lord will fall between the two sides into a very dangerous situation. I don't wish for that to happen.”

In reality, Alaia wasn't worried about the lord, but the people living in the land he resided over. And she was worried about Koutarou who had saved her out of good intentions. If he remained Alaia's ally, both the peoples and his own future would be in danger. So to prevent that, Alaia decided to say farewell to Koutarou.

“I asked Flair to arrange it so that you and Clan-sama would take watch at this time. Please leave while everyone is still sleeping.”

“Princess Alaia...”

Koutarou stumbled to answer. He had to come up with a way to keep travelling with Alaia and her party, but he had trouble arguing when she stared at him with her eyes filled with determination.

How should I answer? What can I say to satisfy her?

Koutarou wasn't the real Blue Knight. The real one most likely wouldn't have any problems answering her. But Koutarou couldn't do it. He couldn't rely on the manuscript either because this scene wasn't in it.

Tell me, Theia!! What would the Blue Knight say here!?

Koutarou thought of Theia who wasn't here. Lies or deception wouldn't work on Alaia and her deep and clear eyes. So some kind of truth was necessary. And he felt that Theia could give him that answer.

No, Theia, what would you do!? How would you answer!?

Koutarou only knew of the Blue Knight from the manuscript. But he knew Theia very well. She was selfish, but at the same time lonely and very gentle. And despite resistance, she wanted to become the ideal royalty worthy of standing above others. Thanks to the time they had spent together, Koutarou was able to imagine what Theia would do.

That's right Theia. That's probably what you would say...

Koutarou's hesitation cleared up. He had finally realized how he should answer Alaia.

“There's no need to worry, princess Alaia.”

Koutarou smiled. His desire to act as the replacement Blue Knight had been too strong and he had lost sight of his true self, Koutarou found that funny. He wasn't much different from Theia when she had first come to Earth. In that case, just like in Theia's case, there was something more important to Koutarou than replacing the Blue Knight.

Before being an emperor, one had to be a splendid noble.

In that case, before he was the Blue Knight, he had to be a splendid knight.

Having realized that, Koutarou no longer hesitated.

“Please let me continue following you, your highness.”

“But Reios-sama, in that case both you and the people of your land will suffer!”

Alaia still held onto her belief. She didn't want to see people suffer, nor did she want to see Koutarou suffer. So words alone weren't enough to satisfy her.

“It's alright, princess Alaia. I can't go into details but I don't serve any lord.”

Koutarou told her the truth. And he also honestly said that he couldn't go into the details that he couldn't tell her.

I just need to do this, right Theia...

In order to keep history from changing, he was acting as the Blue Knight, but he wouldn't be a splendid knight by lying his way through. If he did, he would eventually disappoint and lose the trust placed in him, and as a result, he wouldn't be able to return to his own world. So he followed the path of a knight, despite the risk it involved. He would borrow the Blue Knight's words, but put his own feelings in them. In other words, Koutarou had to be worthy of being a knight.

Giving both mind and body to the nobles, huh...

In the past during their practice, Theia would often say that. Back then he hadn't paid any attention to those words, but now he believed they were correct. Just trying to feign appearance wouldn't work.

“W-What are you—!?”

Alaia was surprised by Koutarou's answer and opened her eyes wide.

A knight roaming the lands without a lord wasn't all that rare. At this era, there were plenty of knights travelling to find a lord. But that was limited to knights where the house they had served had been destroyed or knights that had caused trouble and been banished. But knights generally had no reason to hide the fact that the house they had served had been destroyed and Koutarou didn't look like someone who would cause trouble and get banished.

“Please rest easy, princess Alaia. I may be a wandering knight far from his hometown, but I haven't lost even a fraction of my loyalty to the royal family.”

They were words taken straight from the manuscript. Since Koutarou wasn't sure how a knight spoke, he relied on the Blue Knight. But Koutarou himself wanted to help Alaia. That's why the feelings in the words belonged to him.

It didn't really matter if it was Koutarou's or the Blue Knight's, since Koutarou himself wanted to help Alaia. At first he had only saved her because she looked like Harumi, but having experienced the dangers first hand, he wanted to be of help to her.

And Theia's ideal knight would never lie. If he told her the truth right here, he might not be able to return to his own world, but Koutarou felt like Theia would praise him right now.

“But allying with us who are being pursued for my position is the same as making all of Forthorthe your enemy!”

Even then, Alaia wisely tried to persuade Koutarou. If he had no lord he served, then she definitely couldn't put Koutarou who was unrelated in harm's way. Alaia's sincere eyes were fixed on Koutarou, but he simply nodded at her.

“Certainly, it might be as you say, princess Alaia.”

“Then—”

“But even then, I won't have to make an enemy of my pride, my loyalty and most of all the hearts of the people of Forthorthe. The important thing isn't who my enemy, but who I don't betray.”

There were feelings that Koutarou didn't want to betray. The straight and earnest feeling of wanting to be of help to her mother in her time of need. The legend of the Blue Knight supported that feeling. So Koutarou couldn't ruin that. More important than protecting history or returning home was that Koutarou didn't want to betray that girl’s feelings.

Even if it's a legendary hero, in the end his feelings aren't that far from my own...

While speaking the Blue Knight’s lines, that was how Koutarou felt. The Blue Knight himself must have had something he didn't want to betray too. Thanks to that, the feeling of guilt from fooling Alaia and the others by acting began disappearing. Right now, Koutarou wasn't sure what was an act and what wasn't.

“Reios-sama...”

“And princess Alaia, I'm sure the person who gave me this sword and armor wouldn't forgive me if I abandoned you. So please, let me continue to help you.”

The girl that had given Koutarou the Blue Knight's armor and the treasured sword Saguratin was prideful, strong and gentle. If she learned that Koutarou had abandoned a girl being chased down by her enemies, she would most likely erupt like a volcano.

“Your sword and armor...”

Alaia's glance fell onto Koutarou's armor and sword.

Ah...

Up until now it had been too dark to clearly see, but thanks to it being lit up by the red flame, Alaia could clearly see the crest engraved on Koutarou's armor.

Theiamillis's Blue Knight...?

On it was a title engraved around the crest of a knight fighting a dragon. It was in ancient Forthorthe, though to Alaia it was modern Forthorthe, but engraved were the words Theiamillis's Blue Knight. When she saw that title, Alaia was more shocked than ever before.

Reios-sama isn't a squire, but a holy knight!?

Koutarou had named himself as Reios Fatra Bertorion. So normally, the only words carved around the crest should be Fatra and Blue Knight. But instead what was carved on the armor were the words Theiamillis's Blue Knight. That was different from just Blue Knight; it was a personal title, which meant that he was a holy knight that had been directly appointed by royalty.

That's why he doesn't have a lord! But he should have territory! But there's no land named Bertorion in Forthorthe!

Alaia grew confused. Having seen the title engraved on Koutarou's armor, she understood why Koutarou didn't have a lord he served. That was because Koutarou himself was a lord. But she couldn't understand the rest. Seeing the words Theiamillis's Blue Knight, she could only assume that a female royal called Theiamillis had appointed him. But she didn't know of any royalty with that name, and a city by the name of Bertorion didn't exist. Not even the intelligent Alaia could know that Theiamillis was a royalty 2,000 years in the future, or that Bertorion's territory was a small 6 tatami mat room.

That's right, the sword... if I look at the sword...

Alaia had no knowledge of a royal called Theiamillis, but her crest should decorate the sword. It was normal to carve the family's crest on a knight’s traditional sword in Forthorthe.

A golden flower...? But, this crest doesn't exist amongst the royal family... just what is...?

A golden flower was carved into the handle of Koutarou's sword. Alaia assumed it was a family crest, but in reality it wasn't a family crest, but rather Theia's personal crest.

Koutarou hadn't formally been bestowed the title of knight. Because of that, a knight's sword hadn't been prepared, and he had been given the sword given to Theia to celebrate her birth. As a result, Theia's personal crest took the place of what would normally be a family crest. And that confused Alaia even further.

Just who is this person...?

Alaia didn’t doubt Koutarou; although they had only met the other day, she trusted him. But at the same time, she had no idea who he was.

“I am not wishing to follow you for your own sake. I have things I don't want to betray. Please, allow me to accompany you.”

“Reios-sama.... t-then please, tell me something.”

So Alaia decided to directly confront the question. And she decided that she would trust and accept it, no matter how strange a response she was given.

“Anything you ask.”

Koutarou nodded. He was no longer planning on lying or deceiving Alaia any further. There were things he couldn't say, but he would tell her he couldn't in that case.

Seeing Koutarou nodding, Alaia spoke. She put the question in her mind into words and asked Koutarou for the truth.

“That royal crest engraved on your chestplate. Your appearance, your behavior, and that noble prideful heart. You are without a doubt a true knight of Forthorthe. But...”

At that moment, Koutarou felt a strong sense of deja vu.

Sakuraba-senpai...?

The words that had left Alaia's mouth were words that he heard from on top of the stage just a few months ago.

“But, I have no recollection of the crest on your sword. Just where have you come from?”

Alaia's words had been the same as the line from the play. And that was when Koutarou was caught by surprise once more.

“...From an endless time and a countless distance.”

Koutarou responded to Alaia using the Blue Knight's words. It was as if it corresponded to Koutarou's current state. The Blue Knight's answer was his answer. Koutarou had come from 2,000 years in the future and from the other side of the universe.

Just what is this...?

Koutarou was puzzled by the seemingly bizarre coincidence. Clan had used the term synchronicity, but he didn't want to believe it. That said, he was happy that he didn't need to lie to Alaia.

“From an endless time and... a countless... distance...”

Alaia slowly repeated Koutarou's words.

I wonder what that means... but, I'm sure it's not a lie...

She was puzzled by Koutarou's words as well. But she felt that they weren't a lie. And since she believed it was the truth, Alaia wished.

“Please, lend me your strength, Reios-sama...”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Koutarou gave her a energetic nod and looked to the sky. Above them was the night sky filled with stars.

I've come from quite far away...

Despite this many stars shining, he couldn't see Earth. Earth was far, far away, well beyond what the human eye could see.

“...Reios-sama...”

Looking at Koutarou like that, Alaia thought to herself.

That Koutarou might have come from the world of stars.

Alaia herself was well aware that it was just a childish imagination. But so many stars were shining above them that she wanted to believe it to be the truth.

The Silver Princess

Part 1

Clan was wearing a robe for traveling above her normal outfit, facing an elderly man.

“A knight in blue armor, huh...”

“He's called Reios Fatra Bertorion, have you heard of him?”

The elderly man was the owner of a small inn, he had a mild expression and a slight northern accent. Clan was currently trying to inquire information from him.

“I don't know him. At the very least he hasn't been at my inn.”

“I see..”

“Sorry I couldn't be of help.”

“No, thank you for listening to what I had to say.”

“Take care, miss. There are some worrisome developments in this country.”

“Thank you.”

However, Clan was unable to find the information she was looking for and left the elderly man at the inn.

“Looks like this town was a miss as well...”

Having left the inn, Clan sighed.

Right now, Clan was in a small town by the road. This mountain town wasn't very prosperous and survived on travelers stopping by, so the main street of the town was lined with inns and bars. To Clan, they were all very aged buildings made out of stone or rock. In her age, the only buildings like that were ruins or sightseeing spots. Clan had checked all the inns and bars, but had been unable to gain the information she wanted anywhere.

“Just where is the real Blue Knight...”

Clan's goal was to find the real Blue Knight. Once found, she had to get him to join up with Alaia and correct history. So Clan had separated from Koutarou and the others to follow after the Blue Knight. Clan focused her search around the area where Alaia and her group travelled, and checked all the towns and villages along the way. In the original history, the Blue Knight had met with Alaia before the Mastir checkpoint, so the Blue Knight should still be around the area. Even if he had moved on, there was a high chance that someone had seen him. So she should be able to gain useful information from inns he stayed at or the bars he ate at.

However, despite visiting many towns and villages, she hadn't found anything about the Blue Knight. No matter whom she asked, they claimed they hadn't seen any traveler wearing a blue armor, or had a customer by the name of Reios. Because of that, Clan only grew more and more worried. At first she was sure she would find him right away, but she had begun regretting how naive she had been.

“Today makes it one week, huh... today's the day I return to report...”

Clan had promised to return to Koutarou after a week to report to him, regardless of the results. She had split with Koutarou and the others on the day they decided to cross the mountain to avoid the army. And today was the seventh day, which meant she had to go meet up with Koutarou.

“This is sad... I don't even want to hear what he's going say...”

Clan sighed once more. When she had left, she had been full of confidence and boasted that she would easily find the Blue Knight, so she was reluctant to return telling him she didn't even find a single clue.

“And it's possible that the worst thing imaginable happened.”

Clan had an idea about why she could not find any clues about the Blue Knight.

It was possible that the Blue Knight got involved in the space quake when Koutarou and Clan arrived in this age and died. Or that he had been crushed by the Cradle as it fell.

It's possible that's why she couldn't get any information about the squire in this area. It might be because he was already dead. Thinking like that, things started to make sense, but it would also mean that Clan had killed the Blue Knight. Having at least some feelings for the Blue Knight, being a Forthorthe citizen, she didn't want to believe that was true.

“Hah... what should I tell him...”

Clan sighed as she entered a small alley and began fiddling with her bracelet to find the current location of Koutarou's armor. Before they parted, she had set his armor so that it emitted a signal, and the location of that signal was then displayed over a map.

“It's already been awhile since he passed into Mastir territory...”

The marker showed Koutarou's location to be inside Mastir territory, past the Mastir checkpoint, whilst Clan's marker was still on the other side of the checkpoint, inside Forthorthe's capital, Fornorn's territory. Koutarou and the others had safely avoided the army's pursuit and passed through the checkpoint.

“Then let's go...”

Having confirmed his location, Clan activated the equipment she had used when fighting Koutarou and flew into sky while hiding herself. She was planning on flying all the way to Koutarou like that.

“That Bertorion is quite sly, despite his looks...”

However, though her body may have disappeared, her gloomy feelings still remained.

While Clan was on her way to Koutarou, he himself was in the middle of an interrogation in a room of a small inn.

“Caris, don't be so stubborn and tell us. You told us your name right away.”

“...Hmph.”

The person being interrogated was the magician girl that had been captured a week ago. Based on her outfit, she looked like she was a member of the court magicians, but they didn't know anything but her name, Caris Webnant. Koutarou had struggled to get her to even name herself.

“You're hungry, right?”

Holding a large, roasted bird in his hand, he squatted down in front of Caris and their eyes met.

“I'm not.”

Grrrrr.

“If you tell us what orders you were given to make you transform into a horse, you can eat some too.”

“I-I don't want to eat!”

Grrrrr.

“Is that so? Then I'll eat this village's specialty, roasted Wadowado bird instead.”

“Ugh.”

Grrrrr.

“Oooh, delicious! It's perfectly roasted! The texture of the crusty skin and the smell of the spice covering it blend together and spread throughout the mouth! And the meat is so tender! Every time I bite it, meat juice fills my mouth, it's almost like a soup!”

“G-Gulp.”

The girl, Caris Webnant's lips had remained sealed when strictly interrogated by Flair, not revealing anything, including her name. It wasn't until the person interrogating changed to Koutarou that they finally learned her name.

I was thinking about it when I first met her, but to think she's really weak to this kind of attack...

Koutarou's method to glean information was to simply bait her with food. This was an interrogation that Flair couldn't come up with because the idea that it would work never popped into her head. But Koutarou was different, and he had a strange prejudice against magicians. That they're easy to lure with food or that their lives were sloppy. This was because he had spent a lot of time with Yurika.

“Blue Knight, I want to eat too.”

“Of course, your highness.”

“Ah, hey, Bertorion!”

“Oh Charl, she's taken quite a liking to Reios-sama...”

“This isn't something to laugh about, princess Alaia!”

Charl jumped at Koutarou and took a bite of the roasted bird he was eating. Seeing such poor manners coming from Charl, Flair got angry while Charl's sister Alaia was happily smiling.

“Delicious! Give me more, Blue Knight!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

“D-Damn that Blue Knight, just how rotten can he get!”

Grrrrr.

Seeing Charl stuff her mouth with a delicious looking roast bird, Caris's stomach growled. But it wasn't like she was starving, she was being given meals. She was being given meals, but she was suffering from an extraordinary appetite.

“Caris, it's not like anyone will be at a disadvantage now if you tell us the order you were given a week ago.”

“W-What do you mean!?”

“It's already been a week since you've stopped reporting in. The people who gave you your orders are well aware that you're incapacitated. So it's only obvious for them to make their moves with the assumption that the information has been leaked. So whether you tell us or not won't have any influence on that, right?"

"T-That's..."

Caris's loyalty began wavering. She wanted to eat something delicious, but she couldn't betray the group of magicians that had taken care of her since she was young. But even if she broke her silence, it wouldn't affect them. Then wouldn't it be best if she spoke and got to eat something delicious?

"No, no, I can't! I can't tell you the orders I got directly from Grevanas-sama, who I'm greatly indebted to!"

Grevanas... she got her orders directly from the head of the court magicians...?

Caris had naturally revealed who she had gotten her orders from, but she was so distracted by the roast that she didn't notice.

"You don't have to tell everyone, Caris. You just need to tell me."

"Just you...?"

Caris's glance shifted between the roast and Koutarou. Meanwhile, Koutarou gently smiled and nodded at her.

"That's right. You don't have to tell me who gave you your orders or anything. That would put you in a difficult position."

"You only need to tell me what orders you were given. And then you can eat this."

"*Gulp*"

Grrrr.

Caris' stomach growled repeatedly.

“A-Alright, I'll only tell you. So give it to me warm.”

“Well said! Then we have a deal!”

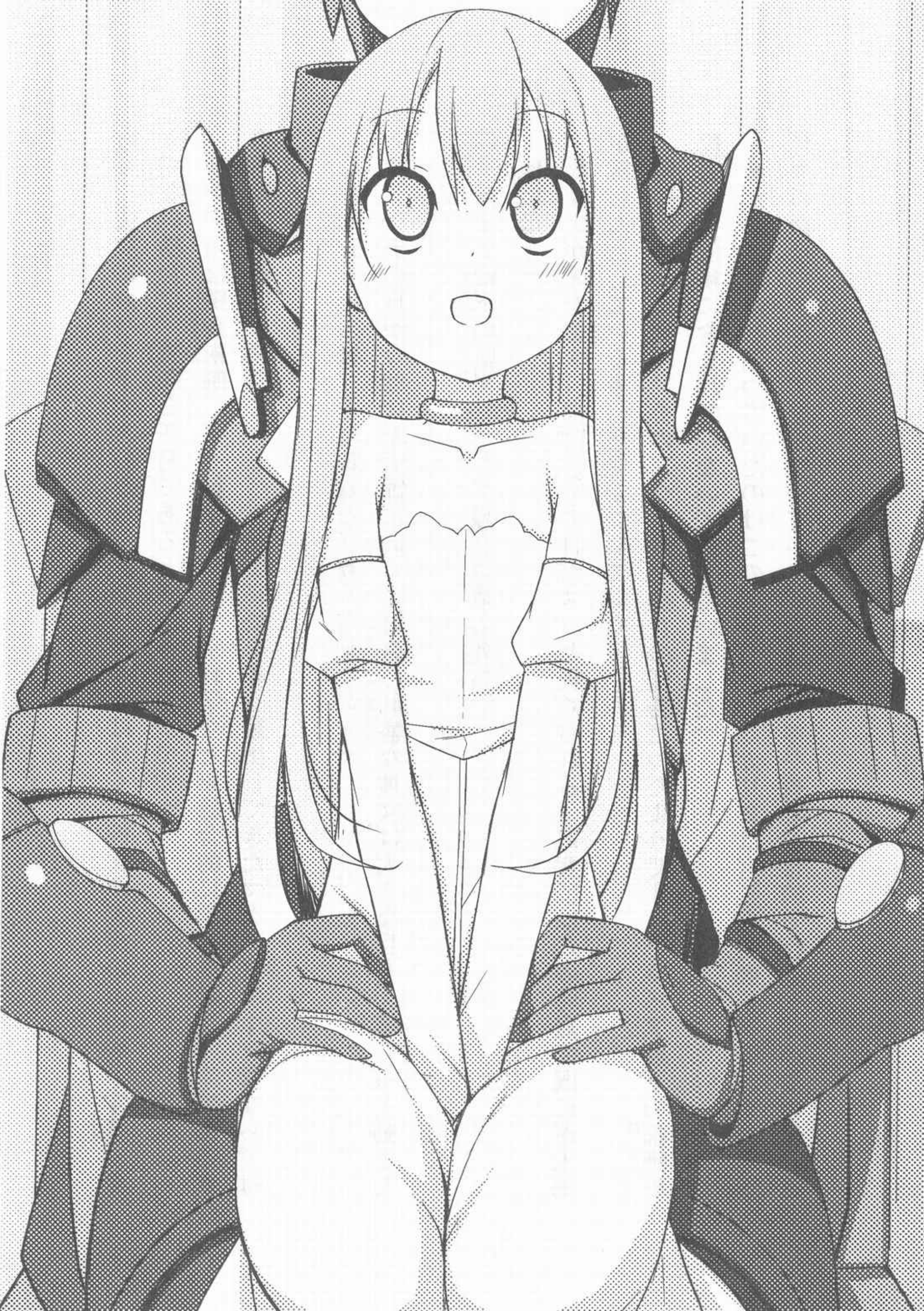
And so Caris revealed yet another secret to Koutarou.

Part 2

“Thank you, Blue Knight!! My kindred spirit!! I knew you were a knight amongst knights when I first met you!!”

“I-I see. Then eat to your heart’s content, Caris.”

“So, Caris-san, what do you want to eat?”



“I'll leave the hard to eat parts for later. First I want to try a normally salted one to get a feel for the ingredient’s original flavor.”

“Okay, just a moment.”

Koutarou left Mary to take care of Caris, who was still bound up, and instead headed towards Alaia who was sitting at a table by the window. Sitting by the table wasn't just Alaia but also Flair, Lidith and Fauna.

“Blue Knight.”

Charl who was right next to him reached her hand out.

“Yes, your highness.”

Koutarou grabbed her hand with a smile and walked up to Alaia and the others.

“Good job, Reios-sama. Please sit.”

Alaia stopped what she was doing and welcomed Koutarou. Koutarou sat down on the chair she had recommended, and Charl then began climbing up on his lap. Koutarou grabbed her and sat her down on top of his lap.

“So how did it go?”

“...It looks like things are getting complicated.”

Koutarou withdrew the smile he had shown to Charl and began speaking seriously. Koutarou was mystified by what Caris had said.

“What do you mean by complicated?”

Flair questioned Koutarou. She had opinions on Koutarou's interrogation methods so she was in a bad mood, but having sensed something ominous from Koutarou's appearance, she forgot that for now and her expression returned to that of a knight's.

“It seems like Caris was acting on orders from the head of the court magicians, Grevanas.”

While minding Caris behind him, Koutarou spoke in a slightly lower voice. He had told her to only tell him so he restrained himself so it wouldn't reach her ears.

“S-Spicy!? Water, water!”

“Very well, right away!!”

But fortunately, Caris was completely occupied with her food, so she wasn't listening to what Koutarou and the others were saying.

“Orders directly from Grevanas... that's strange.”

Lidith, who had been listening, slightly tilted her head. Fauna then looked at her with a confused look.

“What do you mean, Lidith-chan?”

“Based on the clothes she's wearing, Caris is not a very high ranking magician. So if someone were to give her an order, it would be her direct superior, not Grevanas. The only time that wouldn't be the case would be for special missions.”

Lidith was an alchemist: a scholar who studied science, medicine, religion and more, but she also had knowledge outside her expertise.

“Then, Reios-sama, what is that special mission?”

Being very curious by nature, Fauna's eyes then turned towards Koutarou.

“Watching over princess Alaia and reporting the current situation.”

“And?”

Flair urged him to continue. She already had an idea about what Koutarou was about to say.

“There's nothing else. It seems that was her mission. She said that capturing or murdering princess Alaia wasn't part of her mission.”

That was the part that Koutarou thought was odd. Caris had been given direct orders from the head of the court magicians, Grevanas, to keep a watch on Alaia. The soldiers’ orders were to capture or murder her, so it didn't make sense. It would only be natural for Caris to have a similar mission. However, her mission was simply to observe, and they were direct orders from Grevanas. So one would think there was a catch. Since this wasn't in the manuscript, that feeling grew even stronger.

“That is strange. Maybe he doesn't really have any intention of capturing us?”

“Then is he just having the soldiers pretend to chase us, while he's letting us swim?”

“Or could it be that Maxfern and Grevanas' goals are different?”

“It didn't look like they had completely joined forces...”

Flair, Alaia, Fauna and Lidith all had the same opinion as Koutarou, and the four of them began thinking.

Are they trying to flush out princess Alaia's allies...?

That was the first thing Koutarou thought of, but without conviction, his anxiety only grew.

“Blue Knight, there's no need to think so hard about it.”

Only Charl remained smiling. She poked Koutarou's cheeks and said with confidence.

“We don't know the details, but it means it's gotten easier for us to escape, right?”

“...I see.”

Koutarou found himself agreeing with Charl. If it was as Caris had said, Alaia and her party would be somewhat safer. While not knowing what Grevanas was planning was a worrisome point, it was still better than running away from pursuers whose goal was to kill them.

“As expected from princess Charl, it's just as you say.”

“Fufufun, if you've understood my greatness, then continue proving your loyalty, Blue Knight.”

“Understood, your highness.”

A smile returned to Koutarou's lips. The other girls seemed to have the same feeling, and the anxious atmosphere changed to a more relaxed one. Charl seemed happy by that. She showed an even brighter smile and leaned against Koutarou's body.

“Nothing good will come from over thinking this, so let's just agree with princess Charl that it's gotten easier to escape.”

Flair concluded so, since they couldn't question Grevanas in person, there was indeed nothing more they could do.

“I always thought you were a child Charl, but you've gotten more mature.”

Alaia smiled at Charl and got to work on what she was doing before. It was a new hobby she had started, knitting.

“As much as sister’s knitting skills, right, Blue Knight?”

“That's quite the hard question to answer.”

“Oh, are my knitting skills that poor?”

Koutarou stumbled for words, but Alaia cheerfully continued moving her knitting needles. Her skills weren't bad; she was quite good for someone who's just started. But since she had no one to teach her, her progress was slowing down.

“Hahaha, princess Alaia, you should try doing this there.”

“Eh?”

So Koutarou was still more skillful than her. Even though he was clumsy, having spent ten months knitting, he had learned quite a bit. And his teacher was good, so there were lots of things he could teach Alaia.

“You do it like this, here.”

“I see... Reios-sama, you can knit too?”

“Blue Knight, knitting is for women. Leave that to sister and continue proving your loyalty.”

Alaia shot an admiring glance at Koutarou's skillful needle handling, but Charl was dissatisfied. She felt it was wrong for a man to be knitting.

“That's too bad. Here I was thinking of knitting a muffler for you too, princess Charl.”

“That you can knit, that falls under proving your loyalty.”

“Your highness, I'm having a hard time understanding what proves my loyalty and what doesn't.”

“If you're a knight, feel it.”

Seeing Charl's cute behavior, cheerful laughter filled the place.

Clan appeared a few moments after that.

Part 3

Koutarou's room in the inn was for two people. Since they knew that Clan would be returning, Koutarou had prepared a room for two people in advance.

“H-Hey, Bertorion.”

“What?”

Koutarou answered Clan while playing with an operating panel built into the armor's right arm.

The armor’s upright posture was locked and instead the parts of the armor opened. And as if shedding a shell, Koutarou stepped out of the armor. After Koutarou stepped out, the armor closed after him. After making sure of that, Koutarou turned and approached the bed that Clan was sitting on.

“A-Are we sleeping here tonight?”

Clan's face was red. Her eyes shook somewhat anxiously.

“Yeah. What about it?”

“What about it... I-I'm still not married, and...”

Clan turned her face down and looked away from Koutarou.

“Ah, I see!”

Koutarou realized what Clan wanted to say and brought his hands together.

“Don't worry. I won't try to do something strange in this situation.”

“But...”

Having lived everyday together with women in room 106, Koutarou had built up a resistance to women, but Clan, who was a sheltered princess, had almost none towards men. It was a world where she couldn't even imagine spending the night with a man that wasn't family.

“I understand how you feel, but it'll be suspicious if a knight and his servant slept in different rooms. I can only ask that you endure.”

“I-I understand.”

“Trust me, Clan.”

Koutarou smiled wryly. While Clan kept repeating that she understood, she was hugging a pillow and quietly watched Koutarou. It was obvious that she didn't trust him.

“Although we were originally enemies, you're the only one I can rely on right now. There's no way I'd do anything terrible to you, right?”

While saying that, Koutarou looked towards the armor standing behind him.

Koutarou couldn't do the armor's maintenance, so Clan's cooperation was essential. And since there were lots of things he didn't know about Forthorthe's history and culture, her advice was indispensable. In that kind of situation, he couldn't ignore Clan's feelings. It would be the same as throwing away your own lifeline.

“Haaah... I understand. In return, don't look at my sleeping face. Only my future husband can see that.”

“I got it, Clan. Let's make a partition or something there later.”

“...”

After glancing at Koutarou one more time, Clan let go of her pillow. That said, the awkward atmosphere didn't vanish right away. So Koutarou decided to change the topic. Fortunately, there was a lot they needed to talk about.

“Oh yeah, how'd it go on your end, Clan?”

“On my end...? I-I don't want to see your sleeping face—”

“Not that, I meant if you found the real Blue Knight.”

Clan was about to get upset once more, but her expression reverted the moment she heard the words Blue Knight.

“Ah, ahh... t-that's...”

Seeing that reaction, Koutarou could imagine what she would say.

“...No good?”

“Ah, auuu~, y-yes...”

Clan's words grew weaker and more silent. And finally she ended up hugging the pillow she had let go of once again before burying her face in it.

“Yes alone won't help. Explain it please.”

When Koutarou said that, Clan separated her face from the pillow and took a look at his mood.

“You're not angry?”

“Angry? Why?”

“Because... I said I'd find him right away, so...”

Hearing Clan's words, Koutarou remembered her appearance a week ago. Back then she was full of confidence.

She was embarrassed about not being able to do what she boasted so full of pride about, huh...

Understanding Clan's feelings, Koutarou revealed a small smile.

“Stupid. I can tell when I should be shouting or not. Besides, you leaving then full of confidence left me at ease.”

Because Koutarou and Clan had come to this era, history had gotten distorted. But forcing all of the responsibility to correct that distortion onto Clan was wrong. Her leaving full of confidence to go find the real Blue Knight left Koutarou with more hope, and he felt safe leaving it to Clan.

“...”

Clan stared Koutarou in the eyes. She was trying to confirm if Koutarou was telling how he truly felt.

“So don't get depressed, and just explain how it went. Okay?”

“...I understand.”

Clan had stared at Koutarou for a while, but she eventually gathered herself and slowly nodded.

When this man jokes around he's incredibly sly, but when he's serious he can properly behave like a knight...

At the same time, she slightly corrected her evaluation of Koutarou.

“So, how did it go?”

“That's right... for starters, I checked all of the towns and villages around the path that Alaia-san and the others took.”

“I see, that's a sensible way of doing it.”

Koutarou admired Clan's methods.

If Koutarou and Clan hadn't gotten in the way, the Blue Knight would have met up with her somewhere on the way to the Mastir checkpoint. So since he probably travelled normally, checking all of the surrounding towns and villages should have earned her some information. All Clan had to do after that was follow in his footsteps. It was much more sensible than checking the area for a man in blue armor.

“But I couldn't get any information from any town or village. No matter who I asked, they said that they hadn’t seen a man in blue armor, or had a guest by the name of Reios.”

“That's strange...”

“Yes. So the worst possible scenario might have happened.”

“...The worst possible scenario?”

Koutarou who was thinking looked up at Clan's face. She had a serious expression and nodded.

“Yes. The case where when we were thrown to this age, we killed the real Blue Knight.”

“What, killed the Blue Knight...!?”

Koutarou's eyes opened wide. It was a highly unexpected scenario to him.

“Either he got involved in the space quake, or was crushed by the Cradle as it crashed...”

“Then that would explain why you couldn't find any traces of him, but... aren't you overthinking it?”

“Eh?”

This time, Clan's eyes opened wide instead. Having heard what she had to say, Koutarou had come to a different conclusion.

“Couldn't it just be that he's travelling incognito? And he could have stripped his armor as well. My armor moves on its own, but wouldn't it be hard for a knight wearing normal armor to travel whilst wearing it?”

Koutarou's armor was fully powered, so it didn't get in the way when he moved. If anything, it assisted him. But the armors of knights of this age were just metal shaped into armor, so they were heavy and uncomfortable. They weren't something you would wear while travelling. And in reality, Flair was wearing a light armor designed for long travels. It had been decorated to fit a knight, but it used very little actual metal.

“I see, that is much more possible.”

Hearing what Koutarou had to say, Clan nodded.

It seems that he’s less stupid than I first thought... But that makes sense. If he was, I wouldn’t have lost to him twice...

And Clan adjusted her evaluation of Koutarou once more.

“Then, starting from tomorrow I'll expand the search area and expand my targets to knights travelling alone.”

“That sounds good. It’s still too early to draw conclusions.”

Koutarou agreed. He had no objections for her actual search method.

“That's true... So how did it go for you, Bertorion?”

“That's right, about that!”

Koutarou showed a smile the moment Clan asked him.

“You're amazing Clan, everything happened just like you said!”

Koutarou got excited and spoke loudly. At that time, he got closer to Clan's face, and she began hugging her pillow again as she got embarrassed.

“As we crossed the mountain we got attacked by bandits, and after chasing them away we got to the Mastir checkpoint without facing the army!”

The attack by bandits happened just the way it had been written in the manuscript.

When Koutarou and the others were crossing the mountain, three bandits blocked their path, and two additional bandits cut off their escape. The bandits weren't as strong as Forthorthe's army, and there were only five of them. So just like what had happened in the manuscript, Koutarou easily dealt with the three in the front, while Flair got rid of the two behind them. The only difference was that

Yurika wasn't one of the bandits; instead they were rough, bearded men.

“And at the Mastir checkpoint, that role model of loyalty, Soldier A was really there!”

Having chased off the bandits, Koutarou and the others climbed down the mountain and headed for the Mastir checkpoint. Fortunately there was no more trouble, and there were neither pursuers nor an ambush. So they were able to safely reach the checkpoint.

There they met the person who served the role as Soldier A in the manuscript. He wasn't known by name, but he was known throughout Forthorthe because of his loyalty. His loyalty to the royal family was honorable, and when he noticed Alaia, he let them through the checkpoint, even though they had no sign of permission.

“He was called Orion. Unfortunately, A wasn't his initial.”

In the play, Koutarou was originally supposed to play Soldier A, so he had some attachment to him. Therefore he ended up asking for the man's name.

“It's A. Orion's initial is the first in Forthorthe's alphabet. So Soldier A is correct.”

Clan smiled at Koutarou, whose eyes were sparkling like a child’s. The eyes behind the antique glasses were very gentle.

“Really? Anyways, it was really surprising. It happened just like in the manuscript. It was a real help that Theia didn't add a bunch of fluff to the original elements.”

Koutarou pulled out two booklets from his stage outfit and presented them to Clan. The manuscript from last year and the play they were doing now. Receiving the manuscript, Clan flipped through the pages.

“Theiamillis-san is a history maniac, faithful to history, you know. Well, it's not like I can't understand how she feels...”

What Theia wanted wasn't a fictional knight, but a real one. Because of that, she only made necessary minor changes to the story. Because of that, one could say that the manuscript was a prophecy of what was to come.

“So I was thinking, Clan.”

“About what?”

Clan stopped flipping through the pages.

“About the next episode in the manuscript, I want to stop the poisoning of the water source.”

“You want to stop it!?”

Clan hastily shut the manuscript and raised her voice.

“Yeah. We know the water source is going to get poisoned. So if we go ahead, we can stop it, and no one will be hurt, right?”

“You can't, Bertorion!! If you do that, history will change!”

“Now's not the time to worry about history!”

Matching Clan, Koutarou also raised his voice.

“If we just leave it be, lots of people will die!”

If things went according to the manuscript, the water source would soon be poisoned on Maxfern's orders, and the people who drank from it would die. Koutarou wanted to prevent that indiscriminate attack.

“In the end, they succeed in treating it! So there's no need to change history!”

“But even then, some people will still die!! Knowing that, can you still overlook it as Forthorthe royalty!?”

In the play, the Blue Knight ended up stealing medicine from the enemy and successfully treated the poison. But even then, those seriously ill would lose their lives. Koutarou couldn't ignore that. Up until now it had only been Koutarou and Alaia's problems, but now the lives of unrelated people would get involved.

“Wha...”

Clan received a large shock and she was unable to give him a rebuttal.

She was focused on preserving history so she saw the loss of lives of the citizens as unavoidable. But Koutarou's words had made her realize that she only thought of the citizens lives as pieces of a puzzle, leaving her appalled.

I see. That would make me a fake princess, wouldn't it...

Clan recalled Koutarou calling her that before. That was when she first met Koutarou in November. Back then, she took as an insult and lost her temper, but now she felt like he might have had a point. Preserving history, or the lives of the citizens; a royalty would pick the latter. But Clan couldn't do it. So she understood that she had a fatal flaw as royalty.

And this is probably the part that Theiamillis-san trusts so much...

The reason why Theia is so focused on Koutarou, why she lets him use Saguratin. She wouldn't let him use a treasured sword just because of a play. There had to be some kind of reason, and Clan believed that was this part of Koutarou.

“A prideful knight before royalty, huh...”

“What was what?”

“Nothing... Bertorion, it's just as you say.”

Clan changed her mind. Even though there was a large chance that history would change, she shouldn't let her citizens die for nothing.

“Then!?”

“Yes. I know what I said before, but after I calmed down, I want to prevent the water source from being poisoned too. There's a risk that history will change, but I can't just overlook this.”

The problem with the poison would be solved either way. The method in which it was solved would change, but it would be solved either way. So even with a minor change like that, they might still be able to return to their own world. And even if they couldn't return, the safety of the citizens should be protected.

“Well said, Clan!”

Koutarou smiled and slapped Clan on the back with his large hand several times.

“Owow, that hurts.”

“Ah, sorry. I put a little too much force into it.”

“Really now, you're always so unreasonable... Will you take responsibility if we can't return to our own world?”

Clan gave Koutarou a reproachful glance.

“Leave it to me. If you lose your place, I'll let you live in room 106 too.”

Koutarou understood the meaning of Clan's resolution. She had determined that she would protect the citizens, even if she lost the ability to return home.

If it comes down to it, I’ll have to take responsibility for forcing her to make such a resolution...

So Koutarou resolved himself as well.

“So Clan, how do we prevent it?”

“That's the problem. There're plenty of water sources here, and we don't know when they'll poison it.”

“So we have to use the same method you used when looking for the Blue Knight, checking all the water sources in our surrounding?”

“It could be a river, a lake, a well... there's a limit to how much the observation device can cover for us, so we need to narrow it down a bit.”

“Since a lot of people should get sick, we can probably narrow it down to a water source lots of people use.”

“Yes... then for starters, I'll order the observation device to pick up all the large water sources.”

“Please do, Clan.”

Clan began fiddling with her bracelet.

Please do, Clan, huh... really, what am I doing...

Clan couldn't help but find what she was doing funny.

She had come to a backwater planet to get in the way of Theia's trial, and come across a strange neanderthal wearing the Blue Knight's armor. After piling up grudge after grudge, she had gotten obsessed with killing him, but before she knew it, they were now working together to save the lives of Forthorthe's citizens. And what's more, that could end up changing history.

Just what is she doing? That's what Clan had wondered several times now. But now, she was strangely enough about as satisfied as she was doubtful.

Part 4

When Clan began fiddling with her bracelet, silence filled the room. In order to not get in her way, Koutarou sat down on his own bed and looked at her.

At that moment, there was a knock on the door to the room.

“Yes?”

“It's me.”

As Koutarou answered, he could hear Alaia's voice coming from the other side. Koutarou hurriedly jumped up from the bed, ran up to the door and opened it.

“I'm sorry for disturbing you so late at night, Reios-sama.”

“Princess Alaia... what's the matter?”

“Actually, I came here because I had a request.”

Alaia smiled as she said that. Right now her eyes looked similar to those of a mischievous child. It was an expression that Koutarou hadn't seen her show before.

“What kind of request?”

“Before that, will you promise to do as I say after you've listened to what I have to say?”

Alaia continued while smiling.

“That depends on the content...”

“Fufufu, then I won't tell you.”

Alaia was in a more cheerful mood than ever. Koutarou thought it was strange, but he couldn't imagine Alaia, who was always considerate, to say something unreasonable so he decided to listen to her request.

“Very well, if you'll tell me, I'll do as you ask.”

“Thank you, Reios-sama.”

Alaia thanked him and approached the window in the hallway.

“Reios-sama, that.”

“What?”

Koutarou closed the door and approached Alaia and the window. From the window, he could see a crowd of people dancing in a circle around the plaza.

“That's...”

“In this village, a harvest festival is being held for a couple of days, starting today. When it turns to night, it seems to be a custom to go out and dance like that.”

“I see...”

Koutarou remembered that he felt that the village was oddly lively when he first arrived, and that decorations were lined up around the village. They were preparations for the harvest festival.

“So I want to dance there too.”

“Excuse me?”

“I said, I want to dance there too.”

Alaia smiled. She seemed to enjoy seeing Koutarou so perplexed.

“You jest, princess.”

“I am not jesting. Even though it may be a village's harvest festival, a dance is a dance. As a girl of age, I too am interested.”

Of course, Koutarou was against the idea.

“I am against it, princess Alaia.”

“Oh, but you just said that you would do as I say.”

Alaia slightly tilted her head and looked up at Koutarou.

“Now, what will you do?”

It was almost as if she was teasing him as she said that.

“However, it is too dangerous for you to go alone.”

“That's why I am asking you, who hold the title of a knight, to be my escort, Lord Bertorion.”

Alaia normally called Koutarou, Reios-sama, but here she called him Lord Bertorion on purpose.

I've been had, so that's what she was planning.

Hearing that, Koutarou was convinced. She was planning on taking Koutarou to dance with her from the start. Most likely, she had asked Flair and she had objected.

Well...

Koutarou gave up. That's because this was written in the manuscript.

“I am but a mere country knight, I am hardly worthy of the honor.”

“Oh, even though I look like this, I grew up roaming the fields and mountains of northern Mastir. I am quite qualified to be called a country girl.”

Koutarou responded in accordance to the manuscript, and Alaia's reply was just as was written. Because of that, he felt like he was still on stage.

“...Just wait one moment, princess Alaia. I'll tell Clan that I'm stepping out.”

“Thank you, Reios-sama. Please come back before I get tired of waiting.”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Koutarou left the smiling Alaia behind the hallway and returned to the room. As he did he ran into Clan just as he entered.

“I heard everything.”

“Good, then that this won't take long. I'll be going out with the princess for a moment.”

“I understand. But please take care.”

“Are you worried about enemies? It should be fine, there was nothing about an attack during the dance in the manuscript.”

“No, that's not—”

Clan showed a worried expression. She then looked at Alaia on the other side of the door before whispering to Koutarou.

“...I felt the same when I got to the inn, but don't get too friendly with Alaia-san and the others.”

“...Don't get too friendly?”

Koutarou whispered back and had a questioning expression. Koutarou didn't understand why Clan would say that.

“...Yes. Eventually you're going to change places with the real Blue Knight. So if you're too friendly with them, things will get confusing.”

“...Right. That's true, I'll watch out.”

The supporting role shouldn't get too full of himself huh? Well that is true...

If Koutarou got too important for the girls, by the time the real Blue Knight appeared, he might not be needed. That would be a problem.

“...Could you cover for me with the observation device, just in case?”

“...Alright.”

“Then I'll be going. I'll leave the rest to you, Clan.”

“Yes. Good bye, Bertorion.”

Having finished their discussion, Koutarou lightly waved to and turned his back on her.

It could be...

While looking at his back, Clan felt a sense of danger.

Not noticing that, Koutarou disappeared through the door.

“Sorry for keeping you waiting, princess Alaia.”

“If you had been just a little bit slower, I would have gone out by myself.”

“That's jesting a little too much.”

“Fufu, I was just kidding, Reios-sama. Then, shall we go?”

“...It could be that, bringing the real Blue Knight in now might greatly change history...”

According to the legend, by the dance at the harvest festival, Alaia was already in love with the Blue Knight. So since Koutarou had gotten in between them, he had stolen the time they needed to develop their feelings.

Part 5

This village wasn't large enough to call a town, but during the harvest festival there were more people celebrating than in a large town. People gathered from nearby small villages and they all celebrated together. Since the inn that Koutarou and the others were staying in was on the main street, Koutarou and Alaia were swept away by the crowd the moment they stepped out the door.

“R-Reios-sama, kyaa!”

“Your hand!”

“H-Here.”

In order to not get split up in the crowd, the two held hands. With their fingers entwined, just looking at their hands, they looked like lovers.

“What a surprise, Reios-sama.”

Having been raised as a princess, this was the first time Alaia had been in such a large crowd.

“Hahaha, that's true, your highness.”

But that wasn't the case for Koutarou, who was originally a normal guy. While pulling the surprised Alaia towards him, he remembered the fireworks display at Kitsushouharukaze city. The street on the station was very similar to this.

“That's no good, Reios-sama.”

“Hueh?”

Alaia sealed Koutarou's mouth. With a slightly angered expression, she puffed up her cheeks. She then put her mouth next to his ear.

“Here you need to call me Cigna, not your highness.”

“Ah... I'm sorry.”

“Geez, if you don't do it properly, I'll be troubled.”

Calling her Alaia or her highness would attract attention. She was still aware that she was being pursued, so before stepping out, she had decided on a name to be called instead. That name was Cigna. Alaia's formal name was Alaia Kua Mastir Cignaria Tio Forthorthe. She had picked Cigna from Cignaria Tio which meant silvery white snow. It was rather simple, but with that name she wouldn't attract any attention.

“I'll be more careful from now on, Cigna-sama.”

“Can you stop adding sama too? You'll ruin the festive mood.”

“Then you can stop adding sama onto my name as well?”

“That's... Reios-sama is Reios-sama.”

“I don't get it, Cigna-sama.”

“You do get it... Reios-sama you tease.”

Fortunately, nobody had noticed who Alaia was yet. Unlike in the current age, there weren't photos of her circulating the realm, and since this was the harvest festival, many people were dressed up in elegant clothing. Because of that, Alaia's elegant dress and her beautiful silver hair didn't stand out. Most of all, nobody expected a princess on the run to appear in a place like this.

“Still, it gets very lively during a festival.”

Koutarou pulled on Alaia's hand while looking around the area. Aiming to participate in the dance, the two of them headed for the plaza, but since lots of people were in the way it wasn't easy moving forward.

It's really just like at a fireworks display...

Lots of people were pushing and shoving, and cheerful laughter could be heard. Lots of stands lined the streets and the kids, who had been allowed to stay up past bedtime, were looking on in excitement. A festival was a festival, regardless of time and place. It was a scene familiar to Koutarou.

“That's true...”

Alaia looked at the lively people filling the street and smiled gently.

“I'm relieved.”

“Eh?”

“I was worried that ever since Maxfern sprang into action that the lives of the citizens would be in disarray. But it looks like they're all okay...”

Alaia looked towards Koutarou. Just as she had said, her eyes looked full of relief.

So this is what they meant by legendary princess...

Koutarou honestly felt that Alaia was amazing as she smiled. If he was in her shoes, he was sure that he would be too obsessed with avenging the death of his parents to notice anything else.

So when she said to wanted to go to the dance, it was to make sure of this...

And while saying that she wanted to dance, she confirmed the expressions of the villagers. This was probably her showing some consideration to keep her vassals from worrying. Her ability to show such deep consideration at her age shook Koutarou's heart.

“Now, let's go, Cigna-sama.”

“Kya?”

But at the same time, Koutarou also pitied Alaia. Despite being the same age as Koutarou, she shouldered an immense responsibility. Alaia had obviously lead a different life than the girls in Harukaze high school.

Then she should at least have fun now...

Thinking like that, Koutarou instinctively put some strength in the hand gripping Alaia's.

Having entered the plaza, the two of them faced each other in a corner. Since she was still on the run, they couldn't dance somewhere where they stood out.

“Let’s do our best.”

“Yes. Although I am inexperienced when it comes to dancing, so please take it easy on me.”

The bonfires that surrounded the plaza shone the two up in orange colors. After greeting one another, the music that had stopped between melodies started up again.

“Your hand.”

“Yes.”

Holding hands, the two brought their bodies closer to one another. And in rhythm with the music, they began taking steps. The music was mellow and slow, so even the inexperienced Koutarou managed to keep up.

“You're quite good, Reios-sama.”

“You joke. I am barely able to keep up with the music.”

With the time growing late, the music for the dance was getting slower. If a fast tune had begun playing like it had just a while ago, Koutarou would be having a hard time.

“It's better for the mood if a man isn't too good at dancing however.”

“Hearing you say that gives me a leg to stand on.”

“Fufu.”

Meanwhile, Alaia's steps were splendid. They were light like a butterfly and as elegant as silk, but at the same time, more powerful than a bird flying through the high skies. In the harvest festival where one only had to move their body, it was as if she alone was participating in a dance party at a castle.

“That said, it pains me that I'm dragging you down with me.”

Koutarou was barely able to keep up with her lead. Despite having learned some dancing skills from Theia, there was still a large gap between them.

“A princess being skilled at dancing is the same as a knight being skilled at fighting. One could call it a skill required for the profession. So please, don't be too worried.”

Still smiling, Alaia whispered in Koutarou's ear. From that distance, there was no need to worry about someone else overhearing them. And Alaia was casually able to bring out the word 'princess'.

Alaia was good at dancing because she had been educated in dance, which was because there were lots of expectations of her at political and diplomatic parties. One could call it one of her skills used to fight against foreign countries. In that sense, it was similar to a knight being skilled at fighting.

“Actually your highness, just between the two of us, I don't really like fighting.”

“Fufu, I thought that might be the case. But just between the two of us, I don't really like dancing with strangers at dance parties either.”

“I'll carry those words with me.”

“I will do the same... But Reios-sama, I'm not sure what to think of a guard confessing that they don't like fighting to the person they're protecting.”

“Princess Alaia is such a tease.”

“Oh? ...If this had been a castle, you'd be imprisoned for offending royalty. Fufufu.”

“Haha.”

Koutarou and Alaia continued dancing for a while longer. The two of them smiled at each other as they were freed from the bonds of daily life for a moment. Just for now, the two looked like just a boy and girl. That's because they knew that now would be their only chance.

The night grew late in an instant. And while the band temporarily stopped to prepare for the final tune-

“Reios-sama...”

Having stopped moving as the music stopped playing, Alaia, still holding Koutarou's hand, anxiously looked up at Koutarou. From the surprisingly strong grip, Koutarou felt that the worry she was carrying was considerably large.

“What is the matter, princess Alaia?”

Koutarou had a serious expression and whispered to her. Relieved by that voice, Alaia's expression slightly loosened up.

“Reios-sama, I... at a loss.”

She spoke of a worry that she had kept secret.

“What would that be? If you tell me, I might be able to help.”

“Thank you, Reios-sama.”

Alaia smiled and thanked Koutarou, before quickly returning to a serious expression.

“If we continue this travel... and safely reach Pardomshiha territory... Should I really start a war? I am hesitant about that.”

“You're hesitant... why is that?”

In response to Koutarou's question, Alaia used her glance to point out her surroundings.

“Reios-sama, look at our surroundings. Even though the emperor has died, the citizens’ lives haven't changed. The people in the village can still smile. But if I start a war to defeat Maxfern, those smiles will be lost.”

Alaia was worried about chaos spreading through the country from a civil war. If Alaia started a war using a newly created army to fight against the old Forthorthe army now in control by Maxfern, the country would be shaken by a civil war and affect the lives of the citizens. Alaia was at a loss at if there was any meaning in sacrificing the daily life of the citizens to defeat Maxfern.

That said, it wasn't something you could consult with others. It was obvious that if she consulted with Flair, who was very loyal to the royal family, the response would be that Maxfern should be defeated. If she asked her best friend Fauna, since she was a servant of the goddess of dawn, her response would be that justice should be served. So it had been a problem she had been wrestling with all alone before Koutarou appeared.

“But your highness, Maxfern is a criminal.”

Although Koutarou hadn't said it out loud, Maxfern had murdered Alaia's and Charl's parents, the emperor and empress. Koutarou wanted to know if she could really ignore that.

“I know. But if they can establish a good government, I won't mind. What's important isn't my pride, but the lives of the citizens. Isn't that right, Lord Reios Fatra Bertorion?”

Alaia closed her mouth and grinded her teeth. It's not like she had completely accepted her decision either.

“Your highness...”

This person is trying to ensure the happiness of the citizens, even if she has to forget the grudge of having her parents killed and overlook justice...

Hearing Alaia's determination, Koutarou felt humbled.

Alaia must hate Maxfern for killing her parents. She must feel that Maxfern should be punished for using a cheap method to take over the country. But more than all that, she was trying to protect the daily lives of the citizens.

So to Koutarou, Alaia looked beautiful and noble. Enough so that he hesitated, ruining her shining appearance.

“...I will speak, knowing that this is disrespectful.”

Koutarou had to tell Alaia to take down Maxfern. If he didn't, history would greatly change, and he would without a doubt not be able to return to his own world. That was on a completely different league than preventing the poisoning of a water source.

“It's as you say, your highness. There is nothing more important than protecting the lives of the citizens.”

Despite knowing that, Koutarou had told Alaia that she was correct. Alaia's love for the citizens didn't let him say anything else.

“Reios-sama...”

Alaia's eyes began tearing up.

Alaia believed that her thoughts were correct. But even then, she wanted someone to tell her that. She wanted someone to say that what she was doing wasn't out of self-righteousness, that it wasn't because she was afraid of fighting.

So when Koutarou agreed with her, her heart shook. Joy filled her heart now that someone had appeared to give her what she wished for.

“Certainly... if you say that in the imperial court, you might be imprisoned...”

Alaia wiped her tears away. However her tears kept flowing, no matter how many times she wiped them away. The tears shone orange, bathed in the light of the flames.

“Your highness, in a knight's standard, even if a sword was to break, as long as the oath it carried hasn't broken, the knight won't believe his sword has broken. And if they were able to fulfill their oath despite their sword breaking, that would be a great honor.”

A knight's standard. The sword was a knight's soul. However, what should be protected was the oath it carried, rather than the sword itself.

Isn't that right, Theia?

The one who told Koutarou that was a girl with golden hair. To adhere to those teachings, Koutarou had no option but answer like that.

“Father's, mother's, and my own oath are to protect the lives of the citizens.”

“Then, even though they may lose their lives—”

“As long as the citizens are happy, I won't believe they are dead. And I take pride that they lived in accordance to their oath...”

“Yes. It's just as you say.”

Koutarou nodded at Alaia, he no longer had any hesitation.

This person really is the Silver Princess... But, that's why...!

So Koutarou made up his mind. That, though he might step out of his place as the Blue Knight's substitute, but he would protect Alaia no matter what. This might be the moment when Koutarou sworn allegiance to Alaia of his own will.

“But your highness, you may rest easy. No matter what you decide, I will definitely protect you.”

“...Even though I might even stop being a princess, and become just a powerless little girl?”

Alaia wiped her tears away again and smiled. She was trying to say that she wouldn't mind even if she was abandoned.

“Even if you adhere to your oath and become a simple girl, you will forever be my highly esteemed lord.”

Even then, Koutarou's answer didn't change. The girl that taught Koutarou the way of the knight would never forgive him if he abandoned Alaia.

“...Thank you Reios-sama... I will take pride in those words, for the rest of my life...”

As Alaia said that, she pressed her face onto Koutarou's shoulder and her shoulders started trembling. Koutarou assumed that she was crying, but because the band had started playing again, he couldn't hear her crying voice.

Koutarou and Alaia then spent some time standing still, with Alaia still pushing up against his shoulder. Koutarou held her hand and looked up into the starry sky above.

Sorry, everyone... it doesn't look like I'll be coming back...

Koutarou then apologized to the people that should be waiting for him.

Time passed and after the last tune had passed the halfway point, Alaia, who had kept her face pressed against Koutarou's shoulder, looked up.

“...Reios-sama really is different...”

As she said that, Alaia's eyes showed more emotion than ever before. They were feelings of deep trust and affection. At this time, Alaia was realizing that she was in love with Koutarou.

“I am aware that I'm bad at dancing.”

“Fufu, no, that's not what I meant, Reios-sama.”

Alaia smiled. It was a defenseless smile that she had only ever shown her parents and Charl. Seeing that, Koutarou felt like as if his heart had been pierced.

“You are without a doubt a Forthorthe knight. But something at the bottom of your heart is different. Without losing your gentleness, you are a strong and prideful knight.”

“That's...”

That was probably because Koutarou had been born into a country not in war. So he had a gentle heart that Alaia desired.

That heart showed needless naivety in a world of war. And naïve people wouldn't be able to survive on the battlefield. But Koutarou had been given lots of power. The armor had gotten from Theia and the gauntlet from Kiriha; that equipment let Koutarou survive. So with his naïve heart, Koutarou stood in front of Alaia. Through a series of coincidences, the boy Satomi Koutarou had been able to meet Alaia without changing.

“I am jealous of the person you truly serve. Just how did that person make you a knight...”

“At first... she tried to kill me.”

“My... that's impossible for me... fufufu...”

Eventually the two of them began taking steps. More than half of the last tune had passed, so there wasn't much time to dance. But the dance of the two people whose hearts overlapped was fantastic and those watching instinctively swallowed their saliva.

The Beginning of the Legend

Part 1

The village's harvest festival spanned over three days. Today was the second day, so people had gotten up from the early morning to prepare for it.

"Zzzzz, Zzzzz, Zzzzz."

However, Koutarou was an exception and was still sleeping. Being hard to wake up, Koutarou continued sleeping despite his busy surroundings.

"...Wake up, Bertorion!! Hurry and wake up!!"

"Ow!? What are you doing, Theia!!"

However, after receiving a powerful blow to his chin, not even Koutarou could remain sleeping and woke up while complaining to the normal culprit.

"I'm not Theiamillis-san!! It's me, Clariossa!! Hurry up and open your eyes!!

"Hm? H-Huh...?"

But who he saw in front of him wasn't Theia, but a different girl, wearing glasses.

"Keep it together, this is an emergency!!"

"Emergency...?"

Still in a daze and confused, but when Koutarou saw Clan's serious expression and desperate voice, his mind cleared up.

“Clan...?”

“That's right Bertorion!! Something terrible has happened!!”

“...Something terrible?”

Koutarou remembered the situation he was in. And the meaning behind the word emergency finally sunk in.

“What is it Clan, what happened!?”

Seeing Koutarou recover, Clan felt a little relieved and continued talking.

“It's terrible! The people are collapsing all over the place!”

“What!?”

“They all have a high fever and are in pain!”

“Then, could it be...!?”

“That's right! The minister, Maxfern has poisoned the water source!”

Any remaining drowsiness vanished because of Clan's report.

The first ones who came down with symptoms were the elderly and the infants. Because of their low tolerance, their condition grew worse during the night and developed a high fever and chills. Though the village’s doctors and priests were taking care of them, the number of patients just kept increasing. When the sun rose, the adults began coming down with the same condition. As time passed, the number of patients increased even further, and even the doctors and priests began suffering. When Koutarou woke up, the majority of villagers had come down with the same condition.

The poison that was plaguing the village wasn't reacting to any kind of treatment. No antidote, medicine or even the spiritual energy that the priests used to heal would work. No one that had shown symptoms had recovered, and everyone was still suffering.

Alaia and the others had begun showing the same symptoms. The first one to collapse was the young Charl. By dawn, she had developed a high fever and was in pain, after her were Alaia and Fauna. Even Flair laid down on a bed just a moment ago.

But fortunately, neither Clan nor Koutarou were that bad off. Koutarou showed no signs of any symptoms while Clan only had a minor fever. So right now, the two of them were taking care of Alaia and the others.

With a cane in his hand, Koutarou approached one of the beds.

“Caris, I have something I want to ask you.”

“...Eh?”

The one lying on that bed was the magician, Caris. When she began suffering from the poison, the ropes constricting her had been removed and she had been put to bed. The cane in Koutarou's hand was the same one that had been taken from her when she was first captured. When Caris used magic, the cane had the effect of amplifying her magic.

“I'll free you and return this cane to you. In return, can you try removing the poison with your magic?”

Normally freeing a spy like Caris was unthinkable. But now wasn't the time for that, and the situation was urgent. The village was overflowing with patients and people had begun dying.

“...You... want me to heal you people...?”

“Yeah, it's not a bad deal for you. You need to treat yourself too after all.”

Caris's face was getting red and it was obvious that she was suffering from fever and chills. Koutarou looked as if he was praying as he stared at Caris.

“...I understand, I'll give it a try...”

Caris felt like Koutarou was telling to truth so she accepted the deal.

“You will!?”

“Yeah...”

It doesn't sound like a lie either...

She nodded and pulled herself up. Koutarou hurriedly rushed over to her and supported her body.

“Then please get to it right away. You can start on yourself.”

“I understand.”

While Koutarou supported Caris's body, he gave her back the cane. She received the cane and held it in both hands, and closed her eyes to focus.

“...Blue Knight, hold me up for a while...”

“Leave it to me.”

She put the cane to her forehead and slowly began speaking her incantation.

“Gather, spirits of life. Fill up richly like the larger river flowing through the earth. Pour that rich power into my body, fill my weakening life, and dispel the wicked calamity.”

Caris was speaking in the language that was used for ceremonies in Forthorthe of this age. The complex grammar and expressions let the magic power in her and in her surroundings focused into her cane. The gathered magic power made the cane shine blue so clearly that even Koutarou could tell.

So this is magic, huh...!

This wasn't the first time Koutarou had seen Caris use magic, but this was his first time seeing her use magic up front and with a cane. So Koutarou instinctively held his breath when he saw the mysterious scene develop in front of him.

“Life to life, death to death. Divide the coming shore and correct my fate!”

Caris finished her incantation and the blue light from Caris' cane enveloped her body. The incantation had been correctly spoken and the spell had activated.

“Phew...”

Caris let out a large sigh. And at the same time, the blue light enveloping her body disappeared. Having determined that the spell had been completed, Koutarou, slightly excited, asked her what happened.

“So how did it go, Caris!”

However, in contrast to Koutarou, Caris showed a regrettable expression and shook her head.

“...Sadly, it didn't work. I tried using the highest class of healing magic I know, but there's no change in my condition. It might not be a normal poison or disease.”

“I see...”

Koutarou's shoulders dropped, at the same time Caris relaxed her body.

The cane fell out of her hand and onto the floor. After slowly laying her body back down on the bed, Koutarou put a wet rag on her forehead.

“You did well, Caris. Thank you, now rest.”

“Yeah...”

Caris quickly closed her eyes.

“And when you can move, feel free to leave. I'll let everyone know.”

“You're a sincere man...”

“In return, don't do anything to anyone, okay?”

“I know... you really are a strange man...”

After that she didn't speak any more. She was either sleeping, or was in too much pain to speak. Koutarou couldn't differentiate between the two, but he had no intention of talking to her any more as she got weaker. He separated from her and checked on the other girls.

“...The Blue Knight stole the antidote from the enemy and used it to treat them, but... at this rate, no, before then, people will die...”

Alaia, Charl, Fauna, Lidith, Flair. Counting in Caris, there were six girls lying down in beds in the room. And all of them were groaning from their high fever and chills.

“Blue Knight...”

When Koutarou got close, Charl reached out with her hand. He quickly grabbed her hand and was aghast at her high temperature.

“Princess Charl, don't push yourself too hard.”

“Fufufu, I'm fine, this is nothing...”

Despite that, Charl courageously laughed. She was determined to not worry Koutarou. Since he knew that as well, he almost unconsciously shed tears.

“I'll be well soon, so when I do, play with me some more...”

“Of course, your highness.”

“Fufufu...”

Leaving behind a small smile, Charl lost consciousness.

What kind of idiot would just spread poison around indiscriminately!!

Seeing Charl pass out and lose strength, Koutarou was boiling with rage towards Maxfern, who he had never met. And he was angry at himself being unable to do anything.

“Damnit.”

Koutarou's fist crashed into the table. There was nothing else nearby he could take out his anger on.

“I know it's rough Bertorion, but calm down a little.”

“Clan!?”

Koutarou didn't notice Clan entering the room until she called out to him.

“I can't calm down in this situation!! Everyone's in pain!”

“I understand how you feel, but everyone's sleeping so quiet down.”

“S-Sorry.”

Trying to calm down, Koutarou took several deep breaths. Satisfied by seeing that, Clan explained why she had entered the room.

“Bertorion, I know what the poison really is.”

“Really!?”

Koutarou's eyes opened wide in surprise. And he instinctively leaned towards her. He was hoping that they would be able to come up with a treatment.

“Yes. But to be accurate it's not poison.”

“It's not poison...? What do you mean?”

“It's an infectious virus with a very short incubation period. It's only obvious that it would be indistinguishable to the people of this age.”

Clan left Koutarou to nurse Alaia and the others while she was in the other room, analyzing the poison. She investigated blood samples gathered from the patients and the drinking water, trying to find out what poisoned that Maxfern had used.

Thought it might not be apt to call it fortunate, but since they knew that the poison was spread through the water, it wasn't too hard to identify what was the cause. The analytic device that Clan had summoned from the Cradle easily revealed the poison’s true colors, although even Clan was surprised when she learned that it was actually a protein containing RNA.

“So you're saying it's a disease!?”

“Yes. There were large amounts of the virus in the drinking water. Since the incubation period was so short, the people of this age must have assumed it was poison.”

The virus's replication speed was very high, and after a few hours after entering the body, symptoms would begin to show. Since there were almost no diseases known to spread that quickly in this age, the people naturally assumed it was poison.

The people of this age still didn't know of the existence of the virus. And of course, they had no treatment for it. Even when they tried to heal it using magic, there was no effect because they didn't know what they needed to remove from their body. So their only conclusion was that it was an unknown poison, as such their methods of treatment were limited.”

“So, can you cure it!?”

To Koutarou, a method of treatment was more important than the source and effect. So he skipped past several questions and asked Clan for a treatment method.

“That would be hard. There aren't enough materials available to synthesize an antiviral drug. It would have been simple 1,000 years from now...”

Since Clan had already been able to identify the structure of the virus, she was able to synthesize material to inhibit its effects. Clan had the technology for that, but she wasn't able to get her hands on the medicine needed to synthesize it in this age. It was possible to gather the base materials one at a time, but that would take too much time.

“Realistically speaking, there are only two options.”

Clan put up two fingers in front of Koutarou's face.

“What are they!?”

“The first is to steal the treatment from the enemy like the manuscript says. This is the fastest option.”

“And the other?”

“The other option has a large risk to it, and it's not very reliable, but—”

And while Clan was explaining the second option to Koutarou, they heard a voice.

“It's the army!! The army has come!!”

Outside the village were several dozens of soldiers led by a knight.

The Forthorthe army had come. The force belonged to a band of knights known to be very loyal to Maxfern, the Melcemhein family.

The commander was a squire of the Melcemhein family. His force consisted of about 30 common soldiers and five magicians. The number was quite low for what a single squire could lead, but it could be argued that this gave them better mobility.

They set up camp a distance from the village, put up billboards near it and gave out orders from the government. They were orders of capturing and delivering to them Alaia, who was thought to be in the area. As a reward, they would be given an antidote.

Since this region was part of Mastir territory, the loyalty towards the royal family was particularly strong. So it was easy to guess that they would be rejected if they had ordered the citizens to capture Alaia like normal. So first they poisoned the water source to suppress the citizens' resistance. If their own children or wife collapsed, they would desperately search for Alaia.

Part 2

Having heard the circumstances from Koutarou, Alaia quickly made up her mind.

“...Let's surrender to them.”

She raised her staggering body, ravaged by a high fever and stood up while grabbing on to a nearby pillar.

“Y-You can't, your highness! This is a trap!”

Flair objected right away. Desperate, she too got out of her bed and stood in Alaia's way. The other girls also voiced their objections from their beds.

“You can't, Alaia-sama! I think it's a trap too.”

“I'm against it too!! These are people that would spread poison just to capture you, Alaia-sama!! Who knows... what they would do to you!”

“My uncle is a dangerous person. I'm not sure if... they would hand over the antidote even after they get their hands on you, your highness...”

However, despite the girls' words, Alaia didn't change her mind.

“Without the antidote, we will all die. So surrendering and getting the antidote as quickly as possible is the best option.”

Several, previously weak people had already died from the poison. They were all elderly with a low tolerance, but if the situation continued on like this, even the young and strong would run out of stamina and meet the same fate. They couldn't put this village through that just so that they could survive for a few more days. That was Alaia's primary reason for wanting to surrender.

And I have to protect Charl, no matter what...

Most of all, Alaia was worried about Charl. She was Alaia's last remaining family; if she was to lose Charl, she would lose her reason to live. She would rather surrender, get the antidote and save Charl. By doing that, at least Charl would survive.

I'll leave the rest to you, Reios-sama...

Alaia stared at Koutarou without saying a word. She believed that Koutarou would protect Charl even if she wasn't there. It's because she believed in that that she was able to decide to surrender.

“Your highness...”

Koutarou noticed that Alaia put Charl ahead of herself. He understood how she felt. He was painfully aware of how she felt. Koutarou knew just how important your last remaining family member was, as he only had his father left.

“Bertorion, you need to stop her highness! You can't want to see her highness in danger either!”

Flair wanted Koutarou to agree with her. At this point, Flair was developing a sense of trust in Koutarou. After the fight with the mountain bandits a few days ago, the events at the Mastir checkpoint, his relationship with Charl and after watching him dance with Alaia yesterday, she had started to trust Koutarou. Alaia would probably accept what Koutarou would say. Because of that belief, Flair wanted Koutarou to stop Alaia.

“Reios-sama...”

Alaia's eyes seemed to appeal for something. She weakly moved her hand and grasped it, as if desiring something.

Even though you may lose your life, huh...

Looking at Alaia, Koutarou remembered his discussion with her yesterday. And what he had said to her.

“Lord Pardomshiha, I agree with princess Alaia's opinion.”

“Reios-sama!!”

Alaia's serious expression changed. Despite suffering from an illness, her smile was as beautiful as falling silvery white snow.

“Bertorion, what is the meaning of this!?”

Flair raged at Koutarou. She was also suffering from the disease, but with the situation as it was, her anger was more intense than normal.

“Calm down, Lord Pardomshiha. I'm not suggesting that we just hand over princess Alaia.”

“What!?”

“After her highness surrenders and we get our hands on the antidote, we raid the enemy base and recover her. In our current situation, this is the only method of saving both princess Alaia and princess Charl.”

Flair flinched at the mention of Charl's name. She then turned to look at Charl who was sleeping soundly. Even she understood the current situation.

“What do you think, Clan?”

“Lord Bertorion, I support your idea. I've entertained various possibilities, but I think that has the highest probability for success.”

Clan agreed with Koutarou. She had been coming up with multiple strategies in her head, but the most realistic plan was the one that Koutarou had suggested.

“B-But how do you know if we'll succeed!? If things turn for the worse, we'll be in trouble!”

“I don't. All I can do is swear on this sword that I will rescue her highness.”

Koutarou lightly shook Saguratin which was hanging by his waist. Seeing that, Alaia remembered yesterday and revealed a small smile.

“Even then, I will believe in you, Reios-sama.”

“Wait a moment, your highness! There are more than 30 men! Even if we get the antidote, it will be next to impossible to save you on our own!”

“I'm sorry, Flair. But, my knight is swearing on his sword. I can't simply refuse to believe in him.”

Alaia knew just how much Koutarou valued Saguratin, and Koutarou had sworn on his sword that he would rescue her. So even if his sword broke, he would try to rescue Alaia.

That's right, even though his sword might break...

Alaia didn't mind if Koutarou failed to rescue her. Whether he succeeded or not wasn't a problem. There was a meaning in Koutarou swearing an oath to do so. All he had to do was protect Charl, and she wouldn't mind. If he did, she believed she could die in peace.

“Let's go, Reios-sama.”

“As you wish, my princess.”

So Alaia left the room with a smile on her face. She felt neither fear nor despair.

Part 3

The commander of the several dozen men that had come to the village, a squire from the Melcemhein, Dextro, was a cruel man. Being the third son of a poor farmer family was one of the reasons for that, and he didn't relent from using any methods to rise in the ranks. Because that was the kind of man he was, he had been given the command to poison the water source to flush out Alaia. A normal knight might have hesitated after being given those orders, but this man did not. If he completed this mission he was sure to be promoted. That was all that mattered to Dextro.

“Kukuku, what an easy job...”

He had been given a bottle full of black liquid from Maxfern and poured it into the well and nearby river just yesterday. While the people were celebrating the harvest festival, there was no one who found Dextro and his men suspicious. And as it turned to night, the people who had drunk the water began collapsing. Since everyone had to drink water, it was all too easy. Meanwhile, Dextro was simply sleeping in his tent. Now was the same. Dextro was lying down in his tent while drinking alcohol.

“Dextro-sama.”

The soldier serving as his adjutant approached him. The adjutant stood by the entrance to the tent and called out to Dextro.

“What?”

Dextro threw away his cup and answered while he was in a bad mood.

“We found Alaia-sama. She is currently on her way here.”

However, after hearing his adjutant’s response, a smile appeared on Dextro's lips. It was a cruel smile similar to what a cat would have when playing with its prey.

“Stupid, you don't need to call her Alaia-sama.”

“No, but...”

“She's an evil woman who killed the emperor and empress after they found out that she had been embezzling public funds. There's no need to add sama to her name.”

“I-I see...”

Dextro laughed as he looked at his hesitant subordinate. He knew that Maxfern and Grevanas were behind everything. Despite that, he called out Alaia as the culprit. The reason for that was simple; this way, he was more likely to get promoted.

“Well then, let's go greet the former princess.”

Dextro exited the tent while laughing. In contrast to just a moment ago, he was very cheerful. Since he was normally in a bad mood, that sight felt eerie to the adjutant.

As Alaia was walking down the main street of the village, the people flocking the street split up and made way. Despite being ravaged by the disease, Alaia walked down the street in a dignified manner. The appearance was like a certain prophet who split the sea.

Koutarou and Clan were walking right behind her. Since those two were the only ones who could properly move, they were the only ones to accompany Alaia. Flair, Fauna and Lidith were all worried, but they had blended in with the crowd.

“Princess Alaia, don't push yourself too hard.”

“Thank you, Reios-sama, but I don't want them to think I've gotten weak by walking too slow. I can't show weakness at a time like this.”

Koutarou was worried about Alaia's body as she walked in her normal pace, but she courageously shook her head. It was a cardinal rule to not show weakness during negotiations. So until she got her hands on the medicine, Alaia was planning on suppressing her symptoms through sheer willpower.

“And if I waver, the citizens will worry.”

“Your highness...”

Koutarou instinctively held his breath at the sight of Alaia's gallant determination.

So this is what royalty is like...

There were large crowds in their surroundings. Most of them were people who wanted to get medicine for their collapsed family. At the same time, there were plenty of people loyal to the royal family. Alaia couldn't show her suffering for the sake of the negotiation and the people.

“They've come, Lord Bertorion.”

Clan pointed forward. In front of them were soldiers approaching them from the entrance of the village. Leading the soldiers was a lone knight wearing heavy metal armor. Following him were 30 armed soldiers and five magicians wearing black robes and holding wooden canes. In total, there were 36 of them. It was more than enough of a force to meet up with Koutarou, Clan and Alaia.

“You're Alaia?”

Standing in front of Alaia, the man didn't even bow his head out of respect. Instead, he looked down at her and spat out rude words.

“Who are you?”

Despite being faced with that knight, Alaia didn't flinch. But her voice and expression were cold. Her appearance was completely different from when she faced Koutarou or Charl; it was the appearance of a princess facing her enemy.

“I belong to Melcemhein's band of knights, copper knight Dextro. I'm currently a squire, but I plan on becoming a holy knight soon enough.”

“At this rate you'll be a squire forever.”

“Well said, as expected from a former princess. But I'll become a holy knight once I return with you.”

Alaia was still calm, but Koutarou was angered by his way of speaking.

Former princess...!?

“...Calm down, Bertorion.”

If Clan hadn't grabbed Koutarou and stopped him, he might have taken a swing at Dextro.

“Kukuku, don't get so angry, Blue Knight.”

Dextro laughed, seemingly sneering at Koutarou. But Dextro's laughter served to calm down Koutarou instead. He didn't really care if he was looked down on.

“...Sorry, Clan.”

“...Please try not to get reckless.”

Sensing that Koutarou had calmed down, Clan let go of Koutarou.

“Oh, so you're completely reliant on a woman?”

“Yeah. I'd be a good match for your reliance on Maxfern.”

Having experience with fighting, Koutarou was used to this kind of argument. If anything, he felt like he had stepped into the ring and began showing confidence.

“What was that you bastard!

However, Dextro began boiling with rage and glared at Koutarou. Having risen to power believing that strength was everything, he believed that he had earned his position. So being told that he was relying on Maxfern was extremely displeasing.

“Calm down, Dextro. If you're planning on becoming a holy knight, you can't lose your cool because of words.”

“...Tsk, well fine.”

After Alaia pointed that out, Dextro spat out some words and regained his former faint smile.

So he's the type that's emotional but doesn't lose self-control... he's a tough to deal with opponent...

Koutarou analyzed Dextro's character just from their argument. It was important to see through the opponent's personality before a fight.

“Let's cut the greetings here. Come this way, Alaia.”

“You will hand over the antidote, right?”

”That is if you come to me.”

“...It doesn't look like I have a choice.”

Alaia nodded at Dextro and turned back towards Koutarou and Clan.

“I'll be going, Reios-sama.”

When she said that, her tone of voice and expression were just like normal.

“I'll leave the rest to you.”

“...I'll come get you right away.”

“Thank you.”

Alaia responded to Koutarou's whisper with a smile, and turned towards Dextro again.

“Have you said your farewells?”

“I only ordered them to have my favorite Kurka fruit, ready for when I get back.”

“You're quite the woman. I like it!”

Alaia began walking towards the laughing Dextro. It was hard to believe that she was suffering from a disease from just looking at her appearance. Instead, one could feel power and nobility from her appearance.

“Alaia-sama...”

“How sad...”

The citizens seemingly felt the same, and sighs could be heard from various places. Most of the voices that could be heard worried for Alaia's future.

“I've come, Dextro.”

There were about ten or so meters between Alaia and Dextro. So it didn't take much time before Alaia walked that distance.

“Good.”

Dextro grabbed onto Alaia's arm and held on with a strong grip, so that Alaia couldn't shake it off.

Uhh...

Although they were both knights, it felt uncomfortable compared to when Koutarou had touched her. Feeling that, Alaia screamed on the inside, but she never let it out.

“Now, Dextro, give them the antidote you promised.”

Alaia spoke in a dignified manner instead, even at this point, she wouldn't break down.

Even though I may lose my life...!

What protected her was the short time she had spent with Koutarou yesterday.

“You've captured me, so there's no need to let the other suffer is there?”

“That's true. Alright men!”

What's going on?

Koutarou sensed something ominous from Dextro's smile. He felt like as if he was staring into something terribly dark.

“Kill Alaia's followers! Charl too! And if anyone else gets in your way, kill them too!”

“Wha!?”

That was when Alaia's expression changed for the first time. Seeing that, Dextro seemed very pleased. His smile was terribly eerie that made chills run down Alaia's spine.

“That's right, Alaia. That's the kind of face I wanted to see on you!”

“Wait, Dextro! What happened to handing over the antidote!?”

“That kind of thing doesn't exist.”

“Doesn't exist!? What do you mean!?”

Panic, fear and despair appeared on Alaia's face. She knew how Dextro would reply. But despite knowing, she couldn't keep herself from asking.

“It doesn't exist. It never did from the very start. But if I said that, you wouldn't have shown your face, now would you?”

“Wha.”

Alaia was at a loss for words. Instead, Koutarou was the one to open his mouth.

“You spread something that you have no way of treating!?”

“What are you talking about? All we had to do was not drink any of the polluted water.”

Dextro seemed really happy.

“How could you...”

Alaia, who had behaved courageously up until now, began losing strength and her knees gave way. She had been determined not to cry, but tears now streamed down her cheeks.

Charl will, Flair, Fauna, Lidith... the villagers, everyone will die...!!

Alaia was about to lose what she wanted to protect, what she had sworn to protect. Everyone she had done up to now would be for naught. Despair wasn't powerful enough of a word for how she felt. It was an act similar to destroying Alaia's entire world. She lost all strength to stand and sunk down onto the ground.

“Why, why would you do something so horrible... why, Maxfern?”

Alaia turned her face down and shed tears. The tears streamed down her chin, fell onto the dried ground and was absorbed. As she saw her tears disappear, Alaia felt even more helpless. The sense that everything was useless filled her chest.

“Kukuku, that one's easy. It was to capture you. And it also serves as an example. By showing this, any idiot would know what awaits them if they resist. Although since it's a chance to get promoted, I don't want it to stop with just one village.”

Dextro was callous. His impudent words and merciless ridicule was cutting Alaia's heart into pieces.

“Of course, since you're all alone, I might need to crush a lot more villages for my next promotion. Ahahaha, Kuhahahaha!!”

“Uh, Uuuuuh, Uaaaaaah!! Aaaaaaaa!!”

While crouching in place, Alaia finally began to sob. All hope was lost and nothing could be done. Not even the legendary princess could do anything but cry.

“There's no antidote!?”

“Then what!? We're all going to die!?”

“I don't want to!! Why do we all have to die!?”

“At least save the children, I beg you!!”

As if responding to Alaia's cries, panic spread through the crowd of people. And as the soldiers approached to kill Alaia's party, the panic got even worse and the main street fell into chaos.

“Kukukukuku, Fuahahahaha, Ahahahaha!! Kill, Kill, Kill them all!!”

Dextro's loud laughing voice filled the village. His 35 men advanced in an orderly manner. They were planning on going through each home to find Alaia's party. At this rate, the girls who were unable to move because of the disease were sure to be killed. And some of the panicked villagers would be cut down as well. And those who survived would eventually die by the disease anyways. No one could stop them anymore. A large amount of corpses was fated to fill the village.

Part 4

“Clan, don't stop me this time.”

“I won't, Bertorion. I'll only order you.”

However, there were two people who were fighting against that fate. A knight in blue armor and a girl with glasses. Their numbers were too few to repel a force of 35 men.

Despite that, neither of them showed any signs of worrying, and bravely stood in the soldiers’ way.

“Reios Fatra Bertorion.”

“Yes.”

“In this urgent situation without the emperor, princess Clariossa will take her place.”

Alongside a ringing sound, Koutarou unsheathed a large knight sword with a golden handle. Using the tip of the sword he drew a graceful curve and pointed it towards the 35 men. Invited by the ringing tone, a large amount of people turned towards the knight holding a sword.

“This is a royal decree. As a knight of Forthorthe, fulfill your duty!”

“As you wish, my princess! I will do so wholeheartedly!”

This was the first time the legendary hero Reios Fatra Bertorion appeared in front of the eyes of the people.

“Curse you, you contemptible dastard, poisoning a river to capture a single woman. That is unforgivable! Your blood will stain my sword.”

Koutarou poured his anger into his sword and put pressure on the 36 enemies in front of him. The words he had used were from the Blue Knight in the play, but Koutarou didn't care about that. He was angry from the bottom of his heart.

I will save you right away, princess Alaia!

Koutarou directed his rage at Dextro, who had spread a disease just to capture Alaia, and at Maxfern, who had given him that order. What's more was that the disease had no cure and some weakened elderly had already died. At this rate, many people would die as well. That included Alaia and the young Charl. It was hardly a forgivable sin.

And Alaia was currently captured by Dextro. Koutarou couldn't tolerate that. Thinking of the feelings Alaia must have had when she walked up to Dextro of her own free will, and how she must have felt now that Dextro had trampled on those feelings, Koutarou couldn't bear it and wanted to save Alaia as quickly as possible.

“Stupid. What can you do on your own! Oh right, I guess anyone can bark! Kukukuku!”

Dextro sneered at Koutarou. He didn't believe that Koutarou could defeat 36 people on his own.

“That might be the case if it was just me. But sadly, I'm not alone!”

With a small smile on his lips, Koutarou dashed forwards. He was planning on clashing with the 36 men in front of him.

That's right! I have the power they have given to me!

The first thing Koutarou did after starting to run was to unleash the power in his armor.

“Maneuver suit, activate battle mode!”

“As you wish, my lord.”

Obeying Koutarou's order, the armor stopped all normal functions and focused its work on functions relating to fighting.

“Select your weapon.”

“Go with one I always use!”

“Understood. Activating sonic impact.”

The sword in Koutarou's hand began quietly growling. On direct hits, the barrier surrounding the sword would knock out the enemy without killing them. It was the method of attack that Koutarou favored.

“Information: the enemy force consists of 36 people. Breakdown; heavy infantrymen: 1, regular infantrymen: 20, archers: 10, unknown: 5.”

“The unknown five are magicians. You can assume that they are in charge of bombardment and diversion!”

“Understood, reassigning target. Defining the unknown five men as magicians.”

Clan assisted the armor's functions. Through her bracelet, she adjusted the armor's settings and then pulled out her own weapon through a hole in the air.

“Don't kill them, Clan!”

“I know!”

Clan had pulled out an oddly square rifle. In Forthorthe, it was commonly known as a stun rifle. It was a convenient weapon that released electricity and knocked out its target on direct hits.

The reason Koutarou and Clan didn't carelessly kill their enemies was because if they accidentally killed people important in the war, the history would change, but also because they didn't want to kill citizens of Forthorthe. That was also Alaia's wish. And in Koutarou's case, he believed that Theia would have wanted that as well. So in short, the Blue Knight refrained from killing his enemies.

“Fire! Turn them into pincushions!”

Dextro, on the other hand, fully intended to kill Koutarou and Clan. Instead of keeping quiet and watching as Koutarou rushed up to him, he ordered his archers to attack. Obeying Dextro's orders, the archers surrounding him drew their large bows and fired their arrows at Koutarou all at once.

“I'll leave the arrows to you.”

“Understood, deploying barrier.”

As ten arrows approached Koutarou, white, translucent hexagonal tiles appeared around Koutarou. All the arrows smashed into the hexagonal tiles and bounced off.

“Clan, you deal with the guys with bows! We don't want any stray arrows!”

“I understand!”

Clan agreed with Koutarou and readied her rifle. The rifle, linked to the bracelet, then began automatically taking aim for the archers. Since the two of them were being protected by barriers, they didn't need to worry about the arrows, but they wanted to prevent any stray arrows from hitting the crowd.

“The arrows have no effect!? Then, magicians— damn, he's fast!!”

With the arrows not having any effect, Dextro wanted the magicians to attack Koutarou with magic. But with the armor in battle mode, Koutarou was moving fast and quickly closed the distance with the infantrymen. So Dextro lost his chance to attack Koutarou with powerful magic. If he had the magicians attack now, his soldiers would get hit as well.

“It's only one guy! Surround him!”

With no other option, Dextro gave the order for his infantry to attack. Obeying Dextro's orders, the 20 infantrymen spread out to the sides to surround Koutarou. The infantrymen with shields and spears pushed towards Koutarou.

What did Sanae do back then...?

Koutarou focused on his own body, and he then tried to recall the sensation he had when Sanae was clinging onto his back. When he did, Koutarou could feel his spirit being fueled by his rage and flowing through his body.

“Like this!”

That moment, Koutarou's view completely changed. A faint white light overlapped with each of the 20 soldiers. Their intentions to attack turned into various forms of light and told Koutarou where they would attack. That was the spiritual power that Sanae had used when they fought together before to predict oncoming attacks.

“And!”

Koutarou's movements suddenly got sharper. So much in fact that the armor had to hurriedly change its settings to keep up. And with his movements getting better, Koutarou dodged all of the spears being thrust at him with ease. That was a spiritual power that Sanae had used that increased the body's abilities. His movements were precise and without waste. Combined with his attack prediction ability, Koutarou easily dodged all attacks, like a leaf fluttering in the wind.

Koutarou was able to use those powers thanks to the connections that Sanae had created before. That said, Koutarou didn't have as much spiritual energy as Sanae, so he wasn't able to use these powers as well as Sanae. But it was enough to deal with twenty enemies.

“Hey, can you protect princess Alaia with your barrier?”

“Though it will get weaker because of the distance, it is possible. Warning, you will be defenseless.”

“Do I look like I need a barrier right now!?”

Koutarou swung his sword around.

Several explosive sounds rang out and at the same time, five spearmen near Koutarou were sent flying.

“As you wish, my lord.”

“You're awfully reasonable today!”

But there were still five spearmen left. Their spears were thrust towards Koutarou. He was able to dodge three of them, but not the remaining two.

“Warning. Use the barrier to defend yourself.”

“I said I don't need it!”

Koutarou knocked away the remaining two spears, one with Theia's sword in his right hand, and the other with Kiriha's gauntlet on his left hand.

“Uwaaaaaaa!!”

At the same time, the owner of the spear blocked by Kiriha's gauntlet fainted. The current in the gauntlet flowed through the spear into the spearman.

“...Just who is that guy...?”

Seeing Koutarou swiftly knock down six of his men, Dextro who had been overly confident showed a hesitant expression.

“Hey, you guys go too!”

“B-But!! Uwaaaaaa!!”

Having instinctively sensed danger, Dextro ordered the archers forward as well. But three of the archers had already been defeated.

“Damn, it's that woman!!”

Dextro only thought of Clan as Koutarou's powerless servant. He didn't recognize what she was holding as a weapon, so he had carelessly allowed Clan to snipe three of his allies. Adding in the six that Koutarou had defeated, that made a total of nine men down. They had already lost a quarter of their force.

“That's impossible, there're only two of them!!”

Dextro began panicking. He hadn't even entertained the thought of losing up until now. However that thought passed through his mind for a moment. Not wanting to accept that, Dextro shouted out in a loud voice.

“You guys go kill that woman! Don't let her toy with you anymore!”

“Yes!”

Noticing how restless Dextro and his men were, Alaia, who had been crouched down while crying, looked up.

Reios-sama...?

And through her teared up eyes she could see Koutarou slowly advancing towards her.

Reios-sama is fighting... he's protecting everyone...

They couldn't get their hands on the medicine. But Koutarou was fighting to protect the villagers and Alaia's allies.

And he's fighting for my sake...

He was fighting to protect Alaia's promise. Seeing Koutarou's appearance, a certain question entered Alaia's mind.

Despite that, what am I doing here...?

She asked herself why she was lying down here and not doing anything. Shouldn't she be doing something? Didn't she have a duty to fulfill? Even if she didn't, shouldn't she get up and make it easier for Koutarou to save her? Seeing Koutarou's appearance, that's what Alaia began thinking.

That person is still fighting!

A strong will returned to her eyes. But Alaia couldn't stand up right away. She was planning on letting Dextro, who was still grabbing her arm, think she was crying for a while longer, as she looked for her chance.

“Then... hey, magicians! Stop him from moving with your magic!”

Dextro ordered the magicians to attack Koutarou.

“But we'll hit our allies too!”

“If you don't, we'll lose even more! Quit your yapping and do it!”

“U-Understood!”

Despite knowing that his men would get hit as well, Dextro ordered the magicians to use their magic. During this time, Koutarou had defeated three more men, leaving a total of 12 men defeated now. Dextro now considered Koutarou a large threat, and needed a more surefire way of hitting Koutarou, even if it involved hurting his own men.

“Kukuku, no matter how strong he is, he'll have no way of escaping this...”

Oh no!!

Alaia quickly stood up and warned Koutarou.

“Watch out, Reios-sama!! The magicians are aiming for you!!”

“Shut it!! You're already too late!!”

Dextro fearlessly laughed. It was an attack from five magicians at once. No matter how fast he moved, or how high his defense was, he should have no way of avoiding the attack.

“The magicians are!?”

Thanks to Alaia's voice, Koutarou looked towards the magicians and noticed their intention to attack and that their attack would hit the entire area around him. But it was also large enough to hit the remaining eight infantrymen as well.

“Is he planning on attacking me alongside his own soldiers!?”

The moment Koutarou noticed that, the five magicians created a giant fireball. The fireball rested at the tip of their canes and lit up area it.

“High-density energy reaction from the magicians detected. Warning, please use the barrier to defend yourself.”

“You just keep protecting her highness!”

Koutarou rejected the computers proposal and pointed his left hand towards the fireball. Meanwhile, the soldiers around Koutarou began to panic.

“Eh, is the commander trying to kill us with him!?”

“Please save us, commander!!”

“You guys just keep fighting Blue Knight!”

Though the soldiers asked for help, Dextro rejected their pleas in a tone similar to Koutarou's.

“Just how rotten can you get!? If you guys don't want to get hurt, get down!!”

The magicians launched the fireball at the same time Koutarou shouted. Their aim was of course, Koutarou. However, a new fireball appeared in front of them. It had been created by the gauntlet on Koutarou's left hand.

“Go!”

Obeying Koutarou's will, the new fireball headed towards the fireballs the magicians had launched. Koutarou was trying to negate the fireball with his own.

The two fireballs crashed into each other in midair. However, things didn't go as Koutarou had planned. The magicians’ fireball was more powerful, so Koutarou's fireball alone didn't have the firepower to stop it. The fireball continued towards Koutarou, though its power had dropped considerably.

“So it was no good!”

“Warning! Use the barrier—”

“Shut up! If you were made to be used in space then withstand it with your guts!”

Koutarou crossed his arms in front of his face and braced himself. He was planning on enduring the attack with will and guts. The fireball came closer. Its furiously red fire lit up Koutarou.

The fireball exploded.

“...Huh?”

Betraying his expectations, the explosion hadn't harmed Koutarou. The explosion had been prevented by the yellow veil that had appeared in front of Koutarou and vanished.

“I-I don't know what happened, but I'm saved...”

That was one of the defensive spells that Yurika had cast on Koutarou while he was fighting against Clan. It had been dormant for all this time and had only reactivated when it sensed Koutarou's danger, and erased the explosion.

“That's impossible!”

The attack that the five magicians had created had not had any effect. Having had confidence in the attack’s power, Dextro couldn't believe what just happened in front of him.

Dextro wasn't the only one overwhelmed by Koutarou's fighting.

“Lord Pardomshiha, just who is that person?”

“That's... what I want to know, Lidith...”

Alaia's allies couldn't hide their surprise as they watched over Koutarou's battle. It was impressive enough for them to temporarily forget the pain they were in.

“That sword and armor... based on their strength, they have to have been made from alchemy... I can't imagine it being anything else, considering the device incorporated in the armor that lets him use electricity and fire.”

Since Lidith was an alchemist, she imagined that the armor and sword Koutarou was using had been produced from advanced science and technology.

Science of this era hadn't clearly been divided yet, and it wasn't just science, but pharmacology, medicine, magic, supernatural phenomenon and more were all studied under the name of alchemy. The technology for refining metal was included in that as well. Certain alchemists monopolized the manufacturing of higher-strength steels and obtained high profits. So, to Lidith who had seen Koutarou's armor up close, she assumed that it had been created using advanced alchemy.

And if the sword and armor were products of alchemy, it was only natural to assume that the reason he could manipulate electricity and fire using his left arm was thanks to alchemy as well. The people of this age had already discovered basic methods of generating electricity and explosions.

“It's not just alchemy. It looks like he's using spiritual energy to fight as well. He's not as good as me, but it looks like he's able to read the spiritual energy his opponents are emitting. And it looks like he's using spiritual energy to improve his speed.”

Fauna joined in on the discussion. As a servant of the goddess of dawn, she was able to manipulate spiritual energy better than Koutarou. She used her powers to heal the sick and injured. Because of that, she could quickly tell that Koutarou was using spiritual energy to fight.

“His skill with the sword is also considerable... which means that the band of knights Bertorion is from not only trained in the sword, but also in spiritual energy, and also made good use of alchemy...”

Flair was very perplexed as she summarized the discussion. Koutarou's fighting style greatly deviated from what was common amongst knights. She had never heard of such a strange yet powerful band of knights before.

“That's not all. That man is using magic too.”

“Caris!? Why are you here!? Didn't you join up with the other soldiers!?”

Flair was surprised by Caris who had suddenly joined them. She had been told that Koutarou had freed Caris, so she didn't think that Caris was still close.

“That's what I was going to do at first.”

Caris smiled wryly as she leaned onto her cane.

“But on my way there, I heard there was no antidote. They were planning on disposing me alongside with you. So I figured before I die for nothing, I should help that man a little. That's all there is to it.”

Caris had planned to join the soldiers if there was a cure for the disease. But having learned that there was no medicine, she knew that they were planning on killing her alongside Alaia and her party. At the same time, they were indiscriminately killing other people. She didn't take a liking to that.

She had sworn loyalty to Maxfern, or more precisely, the head of the court magicians, Grevanas, because he had picked her up from an orphanage in the slums. Despite that, an indiscriminate attack on the poor populace was taking place. That was a despicable act of betrayal against Caris's loyalty.

Having lost her identity, Caris then remembered Koutarou's words.

“Thank you.”

She had returned because of those words.

“I see...”

Flair sincerely believed Caris. That's what Caris's eyes told her. If she had wanted to kill Flair and the others, she would have done so long ago.

“So Caris, you said Lord Bertorion was using magic...”

Lidith was more interested in Koutarou and wanted to get a more detailed explanation from her. Caris nodded.

“It was when he erased the fireball. It was only momentarily, but he unleashed arc-wizard class magic. I don't know if Blue Knight himself can use magic, but at the very least he's lived in an environment where he's had daily access to powerful magic.”

“...Did you say arc-wizard class magic?”

Flair was perplexed once more.

Arc-wizard refers to the top seven officers of the court magicians. The head of the court magicians, Grevanas is included amongst them. These seven were all very powerful magicians, and they stood at the top of the magic world.

And Koutarou supposedly handled magic of an equivalent power. Because of that, there was one more thing Flair didn't understand.

“Swordsmanship, spiritual energy, alchemy and magic... the pyrotechnic weapon his servant is using is also quite impressive... Just who are those two...?”

“Who knows... but, it's quite clear that the goddess of dawn loves them.”

“Loves Bertorion?”

“No, princess Alaia.”

Caris smiled as she said that, and began walking away, relying on her cane.

“Where are you going?”

“I'm going to support Blue Knight. He'll probably win, but I'm worried about there being five magicians. Leave this to me, and you guys should go protect the other princess.”

“I understand. We'll do just that.”

Flair quickly analyzed the situation in her head and decided to listen to Caris's advice.

It would be hard for Flair to stand against the army while she's suffering from illness. But Caris who could use magic had some methods of helping. It would be best if they left this to Caris and they went to protect Charl. Even though the disease had spread through her body, Flair should still be able to protect Charl from the panicked citizens.

“Let's go, Fauna, Lidith.”

“Lord Pardomshiha, I'll go with Caris.”

“Why?”

“Because of my intellectual curiosity as an alchemist.”

“Then I'll leave this to you. Let's go, Fauna.”

“Yes!”

Flair and Fauna headed towards Charl, while Caris and Lidith headed to support Koutarou.

Part 5

“Hayaaa!!”

Koutarou's sword sparked.

“Guwah!”

One of the remaining two archers received the full brunt of it and rolled across the ground.

”Uwaaaaaaa!!”

The next moment, the other archer who should have barely dodged the sword, let out a scream and collapsed onto the ground. That was because of Clan's rifle.

After Koutarou had erased the magicians’ fireball, the battle had become one-sided. Koutarou dodged all of the soldiers’ attacks, and the magicians’ magic didn't work. The reeling soldiers were defeated by Koutarou and Clan, one after the other. This was in part because of Dextro's order to take Koutarou down at the cost of his own men; his orders no longer reached them.

“...This leaves six more to go.”

Clan smiled fearlessly while exchanging the magazine on the rifle. There were now only six left out of the originally 36 men large force. All that was left was Dextro and the five magicians. Victory was in their grasp.

“To think you could do this much... honestly, you've surprised me Blue Knight.”

“I'll have you give me Alaia back, copper knight Dextro.”

But unexpectedly, Dextro still had an eerie smile on his lips. Koutarou was bothered by that smile he saw as he pointed his sword at Dextro. It didn't seem like he had given into despair.

“I can't give her back to you that easily. This isn't just some game.”

“Reios-sama, don't listen to Dextro's words! He's trying to buy time! The magicians have been doing something for a while now!”

“Tsk. You really need to shut up!”

Dextro pulled on Alaia's arm and drew her to him. He then pointed a knife at her neck.

“Be quiet for a moment, Alaia!”

“Uh!?”

The courageous Alaia didn't let out a scream, but she stopped speaking.

“Your highness!... Hey, what's going on with the barrier!?”

When Koutarou saw that, he got confused and shouted at the armor's computer.

“Target B is inside of the barrier's defensive area.”

“Damnit.”

The barrier created by the armor had protected Alaia at first, but that was intended for stray arrows and explosions, so it couldn't protect her from Dextro who had been next to her the entire time.

“Let go of her highness!”

“Hey now, Blue Knight, don't move now. The same goes for the lady behind you.”

Dextro warned Koutarou who instinctively took a step forward. At the same time he used Alaia's body as a shield to protect himself from Clan's rifle.

”How's it going?”

In that situation, Dextro called out to the magicians behind him.

“We're finishing up right now!”

“Good!”

Dextro showed a satisfied grin after hearing one of the magicians’ report. He had made the magicians do something while his own men were being defeated. With this, the magicians would use up all of their magic, but that was no longer a problem. So he couldn't keep himself from smiling.

“Dextro-sama, here it comes!”

“Here, I'll give you this back! Take good care of her!”

Surprisingly, Dextro let go of Alaia that he had used as a hostage and pushed her towards Koutarou.

“Kyaa!”

Seeing that, Koutarou hurriedly ran forward. Alaia, with her weakened body, fell over after a few steps.

“Princess Alaia!!”

Then it happened while Koutarou's eyes were off of Dextro.

“Wait, Bertorion. Something's strange!”

“Fufufufu, Hahahaha, to think I even have to use this!”

Right behind the area where Alaia had been sitting on the ground, a giant black hole over three meters in diameter appeared. The five magicians had been working together to create it, and it was very similar to the black holes Theia and Clan used to summon their weapons.

“Let me thank you, Blue Knight. I always wanted to use this one!”

Dextro got increasingly excited as the black hole appeared. A joy and excitement similar to when he had first killed a man filled his heart, and a warped smile appeared on his face.

“What!?”

“A space quake reaction!? Bertorion, something big is coming!!”

And then something huge appeared from the giant disc. At first glance, it looked like a knight wearing a black armor, but it was far too large to be called a knight. Once its whole body had passed through the hole, it stood at five meters tall. Alaia, who was right next to it, looked like a doll in comparison.

“J-Just what is this giant knight...?”

Alaia was at a loss for words as the giant knight suddenly appeared next to her.

“Watch out princess Alaia, hurry and get away from there!”

“O-Okay!”

Alaia tried to do as Koutarou suggested, but she was still reeling from the damage from when she had fallen and from her disease, so she wasn't able to move right away.

“I'll be right there, your highness! ...Clan, do you know what that is!?”

Noticing that Alaia couldn't move, Koutarou asked Clan a question while speeding up his running.

“I don't really know! It's definitely made out of steel, but I can't see anything that would be able to power it... But for just a statue, there are too many strange structural parts, I can't tell heads from tails...”

The giant's structure perplexed Clan.

Based on the way it had appeared, she believed it was some kind of combat machine. But when she scanned its interior with her observation device, she couldn't find many mechanical parts. She couldn't find anything that powered it. Her first impression was that it was a metallic frame dressed in armor.

However, upon further analysis, she found that lots of jewels and animal bones had been placed. From an engineering standpoint, that would only lower its structural integrity. What's more, they were all in the interior and couldn't be seen from the outside, so they weren't decorations. There were so many contradictions that Clan wasn't sure what to think.

“A statue!? Not even close, this one's an invincible soldier that's going to kill you all!!”

Dextro laughed. All of a sudden, he was holding a translucent yellow glowing globe in his hand. Inside the globe were three colors; red, orange and yellow swirling around, and for each time the glow of the globe got brighter, a red light filled the giant's eyes.

When the red in the giant's eyes looked like blood, it slowly moved its arm. The arms were like the trunks of gigantic trees, and it extended its empty left hand. Next were its legs. As it was too heavy, it was slightly sinking into the ground, so it moved its left leg and took one step closer to Alaia.

It's pacing was more than twice that of a normal human. Combined with its overwhelming weight, each step was like a small earthquake.

“It moves!? That's impossible, there's no way!!”

“Kukuku, but it is possible. You are now going to be killed by this giant, the Diabolic Soldier.”

Dextro boasted triumphantly as he looked up at the moving giant.

Meanwhile, the giant's body creaked as it moved and reached its giant hand out towards Alaia.

Before its hand could reach her, however, hexagonal tiles appeared and blocked its course. It was the barrier that Koutarou had ordered the armor to protect Alaia with.

But the next moment, the barrier easily collapsed. Because of the distance between Koutarou and Alaia, the barrier had weakened, and it couldn't repel the giant's overwhelming mass. The five meter long giant weighed around ten tons, and when that weight crashed into the small area of the barrier, it had no chance of maintaining itself.

“Kyaaaaaaa!!”

Though she had screamed in surprise, Alaia hadn't screamed in fear up until now. The giant lifted her up by the waist with its giant hand and then held her by its arm.

“Your highness!”

“Noooo, let go!!”

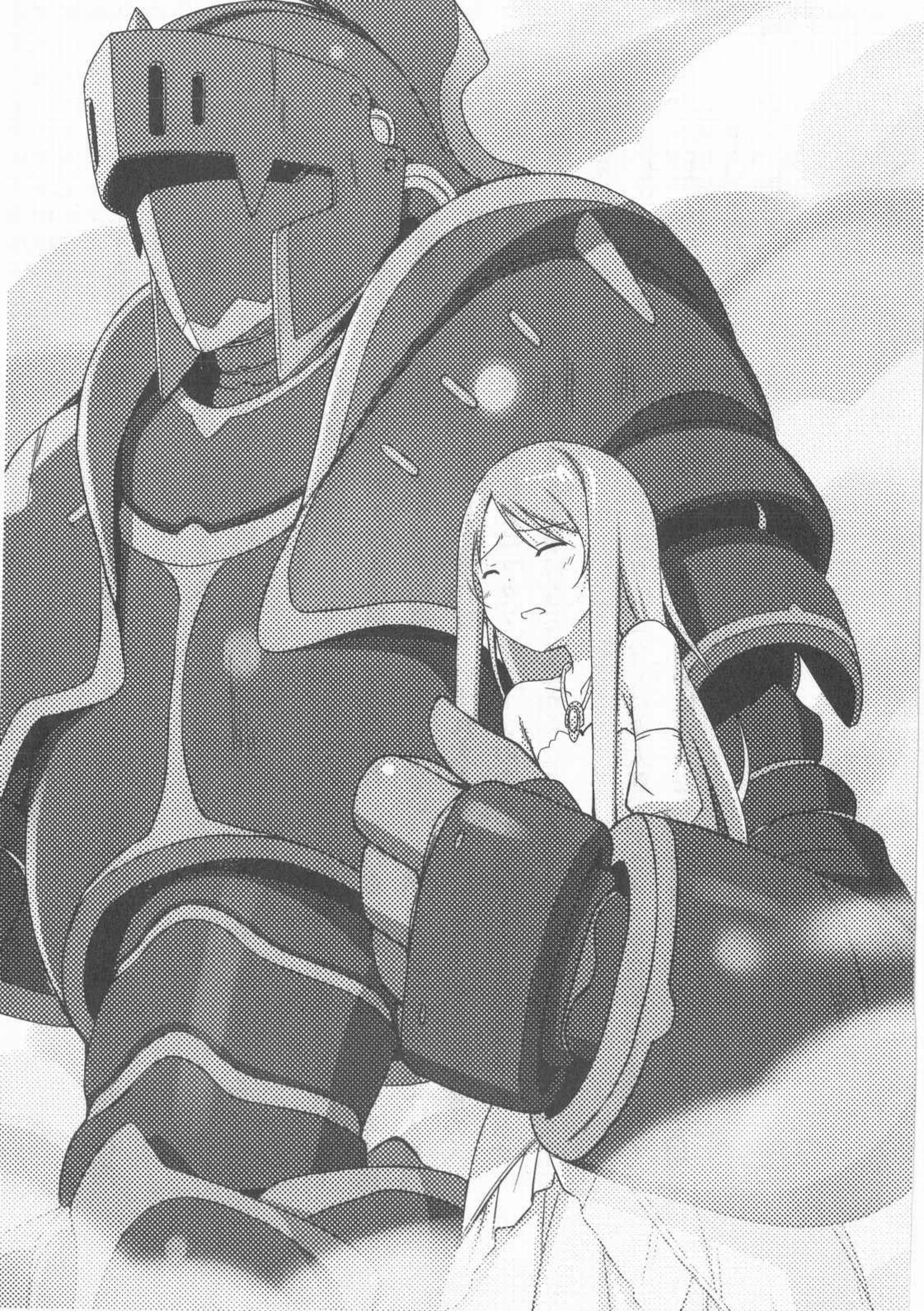
Alaia struggled to break free from the giant's arm. However, the difference in strength was far too vast, and no matter how much she tried, she couldn't get out of its grasp. Instead, wounds appeared on Alaia's white skin.

“Haa~h, I even set her free, this is all because you took your time, Blue Knight.”

“Dextro... you bastard!”

“Reios-sama!!”

Alaia's repeated screams strongly carved the existence of the giant into the hearts of the people in the area. It was a steel giant that moved and fought on its own. Just based on its height and weight alone, one could imagine that was unbelievably strong. Everyone was well aware of just how dangerous it was.



“Uwaaaa, it's a monster!!”

“This is just not possible to beat!”

“S-Someone, save us!!”

The villagers who had begun to regain their calm after Koutarou defeated majority of the soldiers quickly panicked again. They couldn't help it, as they were shown something like this as they began feeling relief.

“Run away! This one will chase you anywhere you go!”

Dextro looked at the panicked villagers with joy in his eyes. He was absolutely confident in the power of this giant. Not even Koutarou who defeated all of his men should be able to take it down.

“Go, Diabolical Soldier! Kill them all!”

Adhering to Dextro's order, the giant shook the ground as it ran. Though it didn't move very fast, thanks to its giant stature, the steps were long, and it shortened distance between it and Koutarou in an instant. Alaia who was being held in its left arm shouted towards Koutarou as he got closer.

“Please run, Reios-sama! Without any antidote, I won't survive! So please save as many as you can!”

That was neither a cry for help nor an order for him to fight. They were simply words out of worry for Koutarou. Alaia didn't think Koutarou could win against the giant either, so she wanted him to run away. She didn't want him to die for nothing for her sake. And if possible, she wanted him to take as many villagers with him as possible.

Your highness...

Hearing Alaia's words, Koutarou who had been confused by the giant's appearance made up his mind. He adjusted his grip on his sword's handle and called out to Clan.

“Clan, you get away!”

“What are you going to do!?”

“As if I could leave princess Alaia behind!!”

Koutarou pointed his sword towards the giant. Alaia was still in enemy hands. In that case, Koutarou couldn't run because of the oath in his sword.

Theia, this wasn't in the play!

While glaring at the oncoming giant, Koutarou complained to Theia on the inside.

“...So Blue Knight didn't run off... good...”

Dextro mumbled in a voice so low that no one could hear him. He was actually feeling relieved.

Having confirmed that Alaia was suffering from the poison, or more accurately, the disease, his primary target wasn't her. The opponent he should be defeating was Koutarou, the powerful knight who hadn't been affected by the poison. Even if she got away, Alaia's fate wouldn't change. But if he let someone who could take on several dozen men on his own go, it would become a large obstacle in the future. There was no guarantee that Koutarou had drunk the poisoned water, and he was sure to be scolded by Maxfern if he let him get away. It could also mean he wouldn't get his promotion. So it was necessary for him to kill Koutarou here.

With those circumstances, it would be the most troublesome for Dextro if Koutarou had abandoned Alaia and ran away. But in the end, Koutarou had stayed, and so he felt relieved.

“Tsk, this is hard!”

Koutarou dodged the giant's huge axe using large steps.

The edge of the axe buried deep into the ground. With that power, it was uncertain whether or not the barrier could protect him.

The giant moved on its own accord, but it didn't have a heart like people, so Koutarou wasn't able to read where the giant would attack. Koutarou had no choice but to jump out of the way of the attacks. His only save was that the giant moved slower than a human, so it wasn't that hard to dodge.

“Haaaaaaaaah!!”

Seeing his chance as the axe was buried into the ground, Koutarou closed the distance and swung his sword. The blade crashed into the front of the giant's body.

However, Koutarou's sword bounced off the giant's armor. Because of the giant's size, its armor was also quite thick. Even though Koutarou borrow power from the armor, he couldn't cut it in half with a single sword, and he only left shallow dents on the armor.

“Damnit, the sword’s not working!”

Koutarou quickly jumped backwards. Almost scratching Koutarou's face, the axe came flying up at him.

“Of course it won't, you idiot. It's useless, anything you try is useless.”

“Shut up!”

“Oh, scary. Well, keep trying Blue Knight. Kukuku....”

With Dextro's laugh in the background, Koutarou repeatedly attacked the giant. But all of the attacks bounced off. He then changed his aim to the joints on the lower half of the giant's body, but this ended up having no effect either. The joints had plenty of armor as well, and Koutarou's attacks did nothing.

“Bertorion, use the same attack you used when you cut the super-space-time repulsion shell in half! That should be enough to cut this giant in half too!”

Clan's voice came through the communicator on the armor.

She had seen Koutarou make his sword shine bright white several times. It could cut through barriers, split beams and even cut her repulsion shell in armor. She figured that if he used the same attack on this giant, it wouldn't come out unscathed.

“No, it's impossible!”

However, Koutarou shook his head while dodging the giant's attacks.

“Why!?”

“I'm not the one doing that! It always lights up and helps me when I'm in trouble; I'm not doing it myself!”

“What!?”

The light that had made Saguratin glow only showed up when Koutarou was in danger or when he had been angry and lent him power. But Koutarou had no way of controlling that, so he couldn't make the sword glow out of his own will.

“And we've been in this world for a while, but it hadn't glowed yet! We can't count on it!”

“Guess we can't! Then leave this to me!”

Clan stood up as she said that. She was currently standing on a roof, several dozen meters away from Koutarou and the giant.

“The Cradle! The antimatter beam rifle!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Clan shouted orders into her bracelet. A black hole appeared next to her and a long barrel stuck out. She waited for it to fully appear out of the black hole and held onto it with both hands. She was holding onto a giant antimatter beam rifle. It was the largest weapon she could handle herself, and its power was quite considerable. However, it had a rather large flaw. The rifle was so large that she couldn't move with it, so she could only use it for sniping.

If this doesn't work, we're out of options...

Clan took aim from on top of the roof. Koutarou was keeping the giant busy, its body is big and its movements slow. It was the perfect target for sniping.

But if this didn't work, there wouldn't be anything else they could do. Because of its storage capacity, the Cradle didn't have a lot of weapons, and there was nothing more powerful than this onboard it. There was still one more repulsion shell, but if she used that, the entire village would be wiped out.

Clan carefully took aim; since Alaia was being held by the giant's left arm she also needed to take care not to hit that area.

If I knew this was going to happen, I should have gotten more practice fighting!

While grieving about the weight of the responsibility on her shoulders, she finally put her target in her scope. Clan was aiming for the giant's head.

“I'm firing, Bertorion!”

Clan pulled the trigger as she shouted out. Koutarou was still fighting the giant, but since she was aiming for the head, there wasn't much worry about hitting him. Her shout was only to let him know about the timing.

A white beam shot out from the long barrel. Since this weapon used electromagnetism to accelerate heavy metal particles, there was no recoil, unlike standard weapons using gunpowder. But Clan's body was still slowly being pushed backwards by the reactionary force; that's just how powerful the beam was. The beam shot through the atmosphere and closed the several dozen meters gap in an instant. The huge, slow giant had no way of dodging something that fast.

The beam struck the giant's head spot on.

“Kyaaa!!”

“Alright!!”

Alaia let out a scream of surprise by the sudden flash, while Koutarou cheered with joy that the attack had hit.

“Did I hit it!?”

Still holding the rifle, Clan checked on the giant. There was faint smoke around the giant's head, but she could clearly see what had happened from where she was.

Having taken a direct hit from the beam, the giant's head had been completely ripped off. The beam had pierced through the left side of the chin and exited through the back of the head. The head was completely shattered by the impact and heat, and steel fragments rained down on Dextro and the magicians.

“D-Damnit, that woman again!”

Dextro swatted away the raining debris and glared at Clan who was several dozen meters away on a roof. Dextro had completely lost his temper. The invincible soldier he had so much faith in had been injured. And the one responsible was a young girl. Every time he was sure of his victory, it had been taken away from him, so Dextro was boiling with anger.

“Kill them, start with that woman!”

Dextro pointed the translucent globe in his hand at Clan. The giant, who was missing its head, began moving again. Unlike a human, losing its head wasn't enough to defeat the giant.

“It can still move!?”

“Kukuku, dieeeeeee!!”

The giant pulled its axe backwards.

“It couldn't— Clan, run away from there right now!!”

“What!?”

At roughly the same time as Koutarou warned Clan, the giant threw its axe, putting all of its weight behind it, at Clan. The steel axe was far larger than she was, and approached her while spinning rapidly. It was a terrifying throw where Clan was sure to die instantly if she was hit.

“This is not funny!!”

Clan threw her rifle away and jumped for cover on the roof.

However, the axe's target wasn't Clan, but the building she was on. If it was destroyed, Clan would be caught in its collapse and be unable to move. Rather than aiming at Clan and risking a miss, it was a much surer attack.

“Kyaaaaa!!”

“Clan!!”

Just as Dextro had planned, the axe easily destroyed the wooden house. Caught up in the collapse, Clan disappeared from Koutarou's view. All that was left was a mountain of rubble, and an axe sticking out of it.

“Clan-sama!”

“Hey Clan, answer me!”

While Alaia was screaming, Koutarou called for Clan through his armor's communicator. However, Clan didn't respond, and the only thing he could hear through the communicator was a static noise.

“Kukuku, did that woman die? Oh well. Even if she was alive, she would just get trampled. Kuhahaha.”

“Clan, Clan!”

Please be safe, Clan!

Koutarou called out to her repeatedly, but the only thing reaching his ears was Dextro's laughter. There was nothing but noise coming from the communicator.

“Now then, next up is you, Blue Knight!”

The giant reached towards its back and pulled out a hammer. Since it was its spare weapon, it was smaller than the axe, but it was still around two meters large.

“Here it comes.”

Koutarou put Clan aside for now and readied his sword. However, since he knew that his sword wasn't going to work, Koutarou was reluctant to start the fight.

What do I do!? How can I win against this thing!?

However, the giant didn't give Koutarou any time to think. It came charging towards Koutarou with the hammer in hand. Since the hammer was smaller than the axe, it could be swung faster.

The hammer scraped against the barrier protecting Koutarou repeatedly, and shaved off the energy used to maintain the barrier.

“Warning. At the current rate of energy usage, it will be impossible to maintain the barrier for longer than a minute.”

”So this is just a battle of attrition!”

Koutarou moved around the hammer while desperately working his head. But he couldn't come up with any good ideas. If Koutarou ran away, the villagers and Alaia's allies would be in danger. That said, he had no idea on how to defeat the giant.

Part 6

“Blue Knight.”

At that moment, Koutarou heard a voice inside his head.

“Who's there!?”

“It’s me, Caris.”

The voice belonged to Caris, and shortly thereafter he heard another person's voice.

“Reios-sama!?”

“I can hear Reios-sama’s and Caris-sama’s voice inside my head... what is...”

“Caris, what is this!?”

Puzzled by the sudden voices in his head, Koutarou continued fighting the giant. He began aiming for the thin fingers on the giant's hand. He was aiming to cut the fingers off to keep the giant from using the hammer.

“Since the situation is urgent I’ll keep it brief. The reason we can talk like this is thanks to the power of magic. You can communicate with people from far away.”

“So this is... magic... how convenient...”

Koutarou's sword was able to slightly cut into the giant's fingers, but a single strike wasn't enough to decapitate them. At this rate, a couple more swings would be required.

“According to Lidith, that giant is a type of magic doll.”

A magic doll is a puppet created by giving life to something lifeless using magic. The doll was called different things based on the material it consisted off; if it was made out of soil, it would be a clay golem, if rocks, a stone golem, and so on.

Through a control gem, the magic doll followed the orders of those it has been registered to obey. So even if the gem was stolen, other people wouldn’t be able to use it. It was necessary to hold a ritual to change the registered person.

After being given an order, the golem is capable of making its own decisions, to a certain degree. In other words, it was an artificial human with a simplified personality. Even if they destroyed the gem in Dextro's hand, the giant would probably continue fighting.

Thanks to those properties, fighting a magic dolls was very troublesome.

“This giant’s body is made of steel created by Maxfern’s alchemists, so it would probably be called a steel golem. Lidith said she had something like this being produced in the atelier.”

Lidith was Maxfern's niece, and she studied alchemy in Maxfern's atelier. During her time there, she had seen a giant being created.

“According to Lidith, various other alchemists have added to it, so it will be hard to defeat. But since it’s a magic doll, it has a weakness.”

“A weakness!? Does it really have something like that!?”

Koutarou kept swinging his sword while responding without moving his mouth. This was something he didn't want Dextro to hear.

"It does. Inside the left side of its chest, where a human's heart would be, is a crystal roughly the size of a human's fist. Destroy that."

"Will that defeat it!?"

"Yes. I have created magic dolls myself, so there's no mistaking it. That crystal is absorbing energy from nature and converting it into magic to move its body. You can see the flow of spiritual energy right? Aim for the spot where the spiritual energy is focused."

"I got it, I'll give it a try!"

Having found a possibility to win, Koutarou's expression eased up as he stared at left side of the giant's chest. The next moment his smile froze.

"By the left side of its chest, you mean..."

"That's right. That's why I talked to both you and princess Alaia."

Alaia was covering the left side giant's chest.

"I don't mind, please do it."

"What do you mean you don't mind, of course I can't do it!"

"Reios-sama, I will die from the poison either way. You can't trade the lives of yourself and the villagers for me."

Alaia was in the way, preventing him from attacking. He would have to circle around and attack it from behind, but it wouldn't be easy. Aware of that, Alaia told Koutarou to go ahead and attack.

"Your highness, I can't do that."

"However, you don't have any other options."

While denying Alaia's words, Koutarou desperately racked his brains.

What can I do, how can I attack the left side of its chest without harming her highness?

At that moment, the hammer was swung down in front of Koutarou. And with the weapon burrowed into the ground, Koutarou swung his sword at the giant's fingers.

He hit the same part as before and the cut got deeper.

Hm?

At that moment, an idea sparked in Koutarou's mind.

"Right, we could do that!"

"Reios-sama!"

That idea was instantaneously transmitted to Alaia and Caris. The two of them agreed with his idea.

"But what do we do before that? How can you crack that thick armor?"

"That's..."

Then, Koutarou's idea was stopped once again. He couldn't come up with an idea to destroy the crystal behind the armor.

"It's okay, Reios-sama."

However, Alaia was smiling in a cheerful manner. She was smiling at Koutarou, who hadn't noticed the solution.

Having been told how to attack by Alaia, Koutarou finished by asking Caris a question.

"Caris, can you stop that thing from moving for just a moment?"

"I'll give it a try. The rest is up to you, Blue Knight."

"Yeah."

Caris's presence got more distant. Sensing that, Koutarou readied his sword. It was finally time for the last round.

"Reios-sama."

"Your highness, I'll save you right away."

"...I wish you the best of luck."

Holding his sword, Koutarou and Alaia stared at each for a tiny moment. But the feelings they conveyed during this time were anything but tiny.

"What's wrong Blue Knight. Over already?"

"The only one it's over for is you."

"Oh, to think you still had the energy to crack jokes. But your breath is getting quite rough."

"Why don't you do some work too?"

"I'll pass. Getting a sweat from working is for underlings."

Geez, to think I'd be struggling this much even after bringing out the Diabolical Soldier...

Despite his confidence tone of voice, Dextro was annoyed that Koutarou hadn't fallen over yet. But seeing that Koutarou's movements were getting slower and more sluggish, Dextro figured that his victory was close at hand.

"I just want to drink some alcohol while relaxing... so you can die now, Blue Knight."

“Just try me. You'll regret not practicing some more with the sword.”

“Keh! I'll admit though, that guts of yours is something else!”

The giant moved forward as Dextro shouted that out. The distance between it and Koutarou closed, and its weapon was now in range. The giant was of course the one to take the first swing as it had superior reach. The hammer roared as it rushed through the air and closed in on Koutarou. He jumped to the side and avoided the hammer.

As the hammer slammed into the ground, Koutarou could feel the earth trembling. Before the quake died down, Koutarou moved in to attack.

“The angle's too shallow!?”

Koutarou's sword struck the back of the giant's hand and bounced off. All the attack did was leave a small dent. But he didn't have the time to feel down. He quickly kicked off the ground and jumped to the side of the giant. The next moment, the giant's right leg came flying through where Koutarou had been. If he had still been there, he probably would have been sent flying as well.

“How about this!?”

Koutarou slammed the flat of his sword into the giant's right leg.

There was a loud noise, but it didn't cause any damage to the giant. However, the blow was enough to slightly offset the giant's balance. Trying to regain its balance, it swung its right arm through the air.

“This time for sure!!”

Koutarou swung his sword down with full force. The blade dug into the giant's fingers, just as planned.

Having taken several hits, the fingers finally came off.

“Alright!”

“What!?”

Leaving only the thumb left on its hand, the other four fingers fell off. And having lost its gripping ability, the hammer in the giant's hand fell down. The tip of the hammer burrowed into the ground and stayed there. Koutarou stopped his attacks and took some distance from the giant.

“I see, so he was aiming for this by only aiming for the fingers!”

Dextro clicked his tongue as he looked at Koutarou moving away.

At the same time, the giant braced itself and regained its balance. The giant then tried to pick up the hammer with its right hand, but noticing that it didn't have any fingers, it stopped for a moment.

Goddess of dawn, please...

Alaia prayed, not sure if her prayers reached the heavens or not. The next moment, the giant gave up on trying to pick up the hammer with its right hand and switched Alaia to the right side. It only had the thumb left on its right hand, but it was enough to carry Alaia. It then went to pick up the hammer with its left hand.

“Now! Do it, Caris!!”

However, that was the moment that Koutarou had been waiting for.

“Release incantation delay!! Spirits of water and earth, now is the time to show your bond!!”

Caris released the magic she had prepared beforehand. It was a spell that created a large marsh at the giant's feet.

The giant sunk into the sudden marsh. It wasn't deep enough for its entire body to sink in, but because of its weight, it was unable to get out. The giant sunk down to its knees and lost the ability to move.

“Damn it, a magician!? Where!? N-No, more importantly, hurry up and get out of there!!”

Dextro hurriedly ordered the giant. If Dextro hadn't taken his eyes off Koutarou, and instead gotten in his way, the following events probably would have changed.

In the end, Dextro didn't do anything himself, and that is what decided his fate.

“Emergency boosters to max power!!”

Koutarou roared.

“As you wish, my lord.”

And as if to drown that out, an explosive noise rang out from his entire body.

That was the sound of the emergency boosters, set up all over his armor, activating. The boosters spewed out flames and an enormous amount of thrust was created. They were backups that were used for the armor’s flight ability. Koutarou's body flew through the air.

“What, what's that sound!?”

“Reios-sama, i-is flying...”

Koutarou flew for but a few seconds. While Dextro and Alaia were still surprised, the boosters' flames cut out and Koutarou landed.

Koutarou burrowed his heels into the ground to stop his sliding. And Koutarou stopped in front of a collapsed house.

“...You got here quicker than I thought, Bertorion.”

There, he found Clan, and next to her was Lidith. Lidith had gotten there ahead of time, woken up the unconscious Clan and explained the circumstances. The two of them waited for Koutarou to come.

“Despite my looks, I'm the type of guy who arrives ahead of time.”

“How impudent... quit your lies, you're always oversleeping.”

Koutarou pulled out a large metallic object from the rubble. Clan or Lidith couldn't have done that, let alone move it. But to Koutarou who was wearing the armor, he was able to pull it out and carry it. And use it. The antimatter beam rifle. It was Clan's weapon that had blown off the giant's head.

“W-What, when did he get all the way over there!? And that weapon...!?”

That was when Dextro finally noticed what Koutarou and the others were planning.

They would keep the giant from moving using magic, and then use the weapon that destroyed the giant's head to attack. And they could only do that after the giant moved Alaia from its left side to its right.

“That's impossible, I even used the Diabolical Soldier, and I'm going to lose!?”

Koutarou and the others were planning on shoot through the giant's weak point with a single shot. Realizing that, Dextro, half-frenzied, called out to the giant.

“I told you to get out of there right now!! Just how slow can you be!?”

But despite Dextro's yells, the giant couldn't get out of the marsh. The size and weight that Dextro had been so proud of were working against it.

“Clan, I'll point this at the enemy! You do the aiming!”

“I know!”

Koutarou held the beam rifle up using both of his hands. Since it was Clan's weapon, it couldn't be used directly through Koutarou's armor. So the one shooting would be Clan.

And the target is...

Koutarou closed his eyes and focused. He could see white swirling light around the left side of the giant's chest.

“Your highness, right there!”

“I understand, Reios-sama!”

Listening to Koutarou's direction, Alaia put her hand at the left side of the giant's chest. Her small hand perfectly overlapped with the white swirling light that Koutarou could see.

“Clan, right there! Aim for where the princess' right hand is!”

“Can you stop ordering me around!?”

Clan adjusted the rifle's aim using her bracelet. The rifle sent out information via Clan's bracelet, and Koutarou's armor moved by itself and fine-tuned the direction of the rifle.

“Your highness, take cover!”

“Okay!”

Alaia pulled her hand away and curled up her body. The giant was still struggling with getting out of the marsh, now was the perfect chance.

“Now! Fire!”

“I know, I understand, geez!”

Having confirmed that Alaia was out of range, Clan entered the firing order into her bracelet.

A white flash fired from its long barrel once more. It soared through the sky like an arrow of light and pierced the giant's left side.

Having lost its power source, the giant stopped moving in the marsh. Looking at that, Dextro sat down absentmindedly while Koutarou pointed his sword at him.

“The match has been decided, copper knight Dextro.”

“Yeah. It's my loss...”

Dextro, unexpectedly enough, admitted his defeat.

“To think I'd lose after using the Diabolical Soldier... Blue Knight, just who are you?”

Dextro was extremely confident in the giant's strength. With its destruction, Dextro was able to honestly admit his loss. He couldn't come up with any other way of defeating Koutarou.

Seeing Dextro like that, Koutarou put Saguratin back in its sheath.

“I'm a traveler. A simple traveler in a complicated situation.”

“A traveler? …Damn, I'm out of luck...”

Dextro let out a loud sigh and let his body fall over to the side.

“No, it's the opposite... Alaia's blessed with luck...”

“Just tell me something, Dextro.”

“Sure.”

“In the last moments, why didn't you use princess Alaia as a shield?”

Just a while before, Dextro had used Alaia as a shield to keep Koutarou and Clan in check, so Koutarou couldn't understand why he hadn't done the same this time.

“I'd be in more trouble if by any chance the worst possible outcome occurred.”

“The worst?”

“Yeah.”

Dextro had a self-ridiculing smile on his lips.

“My orders were to capture and return with Alaia. However, there was a single condition. I could let her experience so much pain that she wanted to die, I could let her drink the incurable poison. I could even let her get away. However, I couldn't directly kill her, no matter what.”

“You can't kill her...?”

Dextro had infected Alaia with the disease, and he had pretended that he would kill her, but he wasn't allowed to kill her right away. Hearing that, Koutarou recalled something.

Is he the same as Caris...?

That was that like Caris, he hadn't received orders to kill Alaia. Both of them pursued Alaia, but at the very end, they couldn't lay their hands on her. Koutarou found that mysterious.

“And I'm not good at giving the Diabolical Soldier complicated commands. There was no guarantee of being able to properly use Alaia. It's different from when I use her as a shield myself.”

“I see...”

The giant had a will of its own, however it wasn't as good as humans at making complicated decisions. If Dextro had ordered it to use Alaia as a shield, there was a chance that it'd fail. So Dextro decided not to order the giant to do so.

“Dextro, you should have tried to grasp victory by fighting yourself.”

“...You're not wrong. What a blunder...”

If Dextro hadn't brought out the giant and instead fought, using Alaia as a hostage, he might have been able to defeat Koutarou and Clan. Winning with his own strength was the principle he had grown up believing.

“That's all I wanted to say. Bye, Dextro.”

Koutarou turned his back on Dextro, who was lying down.

“Are you sure you don't want to kill me?”

“No matter who her highness's opponent is, she doesn't want any Forthorthe citizens to die.”

Koutarou himself want to at least pummel Dextro. He didn't really care if he died. He had done so much evil, however Alaia didn't want that, so Koutarou decided not to do anything else.

“Besides, I trust you.”

Koutarou looked back at Dextro and lifted the edge of his lips.

“You trust me!?”

Shocked, Dextro raised his upper body.

“Yeah. You're cunning and care about your own profit. So you won't make the mistake of fighting us directly again.”

“Ha....”

However, Dextro began laughing after hearing Koutarou's next words.

“Hahaha, you're damn right, Blue Knight!! That's absolutely true!! Kuhahahaha!!”

It was a bright laughter that laughed off even his own defeat.

Having finished his discussion with Dextro, Koutarou headed towards Alaia. He had left her to Clan and the others, so Clan, Lidith and Caris were already there.

“Aren't you feeling high and mighty, leaving a princess to go chatting, Reios-sama.”

“Well, I was surrounded by unique people in my hometown.”

“Fufu, you're even good at knitting, Reios-sama.”

Alaia had already been saved from the giant's grasp and welcomed Koutarou with a special smile she wouldn't show anyone else.

“I'm glad you're safe, princess Alaia.”

“Well done, Reios-sama.”

As the two of them were talking, they both relaxed their shoulders at the same time. Having been on guard all this time, after seeing that the other is safe, they felt relieved. However, that was when she lost her balance.

“Ah...”

“Your highness!”

Koutarou hurriedly rushed to keep her from falling.

Not good, her highness is still...

During the tense conflict, Koutarou had temporarily forgotten that Alaia was ill and shouldn't even be walking.

“Your highness.”

“Kyaa.”

So Koutarou picked her up, and was planning on carrying her to the inn.

“I'm fine, Reios-sama. I can walk on my own.”

“Princess Alaia, you've already worked enough. Please take care of yourself a little more.”

Fortunately, thanks to his armor, carrying Alaia was nothing to Koutarou and he began walking like normal.

“...I understand, t-then, please do.”

Saying that, Alaia relaxed her body and closed her eyes.

That’s right... the problem still isn’t solved. We’ve only survived the danger directly in front of us...

Alaia's complexion was getting worse by the minute. The disease was getting worse. And it wasn't just Alaia, but the same was true for everyone in the village. They had repelled Dextro, but they had no solution for the disease plaguing the village. The village was still in the midst of danger.

“Blue Knight, what do we do now?”

Caris called out to him, but Koutarou just shook his head.

“I don't know. Dextro didn't have any antidote. If only there was some kind of solution...”

There was no medicine to treat the virus that Dextro had spread on Maxfern's orders. In the play there was medicine, so Koutarou was sure that he'd be able to get it from Dextro. However, reality was different.

That was when Clan, who had been thinking with a serious expression all this time opened her mouth.

“...Guess it can't be avoided. I can't really get behind it, but I guess we have to use our last resort.”

“Last resort!? Clan-san, do you have a treatment method!?”

Lidith, Maxfern's niece, had been feeling guilty about the case. So when Clan mentioned the term last resort, she was the first to ask.

“Y-Yes...”

Overwhelmed by Lidith, Clan nodded her head. When she did, Koutarou was the next to react.

“Is that true!? Clan!!”

“Bertorion, I told you there was another method before.”

“Really?”

“Yes. This method doesn't have a high chance of success and there's a large risk, but there's not much else we can do in this situation.”

After smiling wryly at Koutarou, she pulled her expression together. That was the expression of a princess that she only showed when she was serious.

Reios Fatra Bertorion

Several days after Koutarou and the others had repelled Dextro and his men. The villagers were about to restart the harvest festival. Because of the disease and soldiers, it was about to be cancelled, but because of the wishes of the villagers, it was continued.

“Hey, Blue Knight!”

“Yes, your highness?”

“It's nothing. Just be there.”

“Okay...”

“Don't go ahead with just sister and you again.”

“I won't, really...”

Koutarou and Charl had promised to walk around the harvest festival together. Charl was holding a grudge because Koutarou and Alaia had gone out with just the two of them before.

“Charl-sama, if you don't hurry up and change you can't go outside.”

“I know, I know.”

Charl was in the middle of changing her clothes behind a screen. The maid, Mary, had been helping her, and the two of them had been making a commotion for a while now. Meanwhile, Koutarou was sitting in a chair, waiting for her to finish changing.

“I'm glad you're energetic again, Charl.”

“That's true... for a moment, I wasn't sure what would happen...”

Alaia was sitting on the opposite side of Koutarou. Next to her were Flair and Fauna as well. The four of them were sitting around a table.

“Everyone feeling better is all thanks to Clan-chan working all night. You have a great servant, Reios-sama.”

“Hahaha, I'll let her know that Fauna-san praised her later.”

Fauna called Clan, 'Clan-chan'. Clan didn't seem to like it and would frequently complain to Koutarou.

“Reios-sama.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“After these events, there's something that I have decided on.”

Showing a faint smile, Alaia's eyes were serious.

“I will continue travelling to Pardomshiha territory and fight against Maxfern.”

“So you've made your decision.”

I see, so that's why her eyes are so serious...

Hearing Alaia's words, Koutarou realized the meaning behind her expression.

“Yes. In order to capture me, Maxfern indiscriminately poisoned an entire village. I can't let someone like that lead people.”

Alaia stared right into Koutarou's eyes and clearly stated her decision.

“So I will defeat Maxfern, and carry out my duty as royalty of this country.”

“That's a marvelous resolution.”

A few days ago, Alaia was fine with leaving to country to Maxfern as long as he could lead the people. What should be protected first and foremost was not the law nor pride, but the citizens.

However, Maxfern had ordered an indiscriminate attack on the citizens, and that helped Alaia to make up her mind. Because the people that should be protected had been harmed.

“Please allow me to lend you my strength.”

“Thank you, Reios-sama. I feel like I've gained the support of a million men.”

“What are you doing chatting with just sister, Blue Knight!? Let me in on it too!”

“Ah, you can't go out looking like that, Charl-sama!”

That was when Charl jumped out from behind the screen, wearing only her underwear.

“Reios-sama, excuse me!!”

“W-What!?”

“Sister, let’s appoint Blue Knight to be our personal bodyguard!”

However, before Koutarou could see Charl, Mary covered his eyes with her hands.

Hearing a loud cheer coming from the outside, Clan stopped operating her device.

“What could that be?”

“Just hold on a minute...”

Noticing the same thing, Lidith who had been acting as Clan's assistant these past few days opened the window and took a look on the outside situation.

“Ah, it looks like Alaia-sama and the others went out.”

“I see.”

Having stopped on what she was working on, Clan walked up to the window and began looking outside alongside Lidith. Since their room was on the third floor, they could tell what was happening on the street below. Outside the inn was a large crowd, surrounding Alaia, Koutarou and the others who had gone out to enjoy the festival.

“Alaia-sama!”

“Blue Knight-sama! Thank you for saving my daughter!!”

“Please retake the country from Maxfern!!”

The crowd was shouting words of gratitude and encouragement. The villagers were all healthy looking, with no signs of being sick.

“Geez... unaware of my hard work...”

While looking at Koutarou responding to the crowds cheers while carrying Charl on his shoulders, Clan smiled. That gentle smile held friendly emotions towards Koutarou.

Clan had rewritten the villagers’ genes to treat the disease.

Koutarou had not developed any symptoms after coming into contact with the virus, and Clan had only come down with a mild fever. So by comparing the genetic differences between the patients, Koutarou, and Clan, she was able to identify a gene that was resistant to the sickness.

Clan injected that gene with the virus in question, and created a reconstructed virus. By injecting that into a patient showing symptoms, their genes were rapidly rewritten into the virus tolerant gene. By doing that, a part of the patient’s genes were replaced with Koutarou's, and they were given a tolerance.

All that was left after that was to remove the reconstructed virus from the patient and inject it into someone else.

And since the virus and the reconstructed virus counteracted each other, there were no signs of the virus left in the patient. Because of that, almost all the patients had recovered by today.

But at the same time, this was a gamble that had a large risk.

The first problem was the time. Treating all the villagers in the village would take some amount of time. If Maxfern's soldiers attacked during that time, everything would be over.

And there was no guarantee that the restructured virus would have the desired effect. The effect might also differ from person to person. So there was no way of knowing the rate of success until actually trying it.

Moreover, it was common for a virus to suddenly mutate. Several generations were created as the virus spread, meaning that there was a chance for the virus to mutate. In the worst case scenario, a new disease could be created. That would be the start of another nightmare.

That was why Clan was reluctant at using this last resort until the very end. Stealing the antidote from Dextro would have been much safer.

In the end, they had been fortunate, and what Clan had feared didn't occur.

Maxfern's soldiers hadn't attacked the village. They were waiting for the poison they had spread to dissipate and for Alaia and the others to die. Because of that, they were able to get enough time to treat the virus, but they couldn't really celebrate. The army was most likely using the time to prepare and was waiting for them up ahead.

The reconstructed virus was compatible with all the patients, and had successfully rewritten their genes. There were still a few, highly exhausted people who died, but overall it was a great success.

And a sudden mutation of the virus hadn't occurred. That was the biggest danger that Clan was worried about. So much so that once the treatment safely ended, Clan lost all power to stand.

Clan never wanted to make such a dangerous gamble again. Having balanced on a thin line, Clan was completely mentally exhausted.

Since explaining this treatment method to the villagers would be hard, Koutarou said that he had gotten the medicine from Dextro and the others. It was far easier to claim that a medicine that didn't exist actually existed, than explaining that it had been created using strange technology.

“Just how much did I struggle during these past few days...”

Clan put her elbows on the window frame and stared out over the village. Still smiling, she didn't actually think her struggles were that bad. She knew that Maxfern's men were waiting up ahead, but today she was rejoiced at their victory.

“Isn't it fine, Clan-san? If Lord Bertorion becomes famous, you'll benefit as his servant as well.”

“Servant... Servant, right...”

Clan disliked being called a servant more than the existence of their enemies.

“If it wasn't for me, this would have been a disaster, I can't accept being considered the support role.”

“Now, now, Clan-san.”

Lidith understood Clan's feelings, so she smiled gently just as Clan. Having helped Clan as an assistant these past few days, she had gotten to know her better.

“Let's toast together later. To me, Clan-san is today's star.”

Lidith followed Clan up. However at this point, Clan couldn't hear her. Her complexion was pale and her mouth was wide open.

Wait!? If it wasn't for me...!?'

Clan was aghast at her own words. They were certainly true.

That was a virus that magic or medicine of this age couldn't cure. If the real Blue Knight had been here, could he have treated it?

What's more, Clan had some tolerance towards the disease. Couldn't she have gotten that resistance after rewriting the genes of the people of this age?

And if assuming that the Blue Knight’s famous words 'From an endless time and a countless distance' came from someone else, it all made sense.

“I see, so that's what it was!! No wonder I couldn't find him no matter how hard I looked!!”

Clan slammed her hands into the window frame and pushed herself up. All the questions she had been carrying around suddenly all fit together as pieces of a puzzle and pointed to a single answer.

If I hadn't been here, the disease couldn't have been cured! There's only one explanation for why I had a tolerance towards the disease and why I had to be here! In the legend of the Blue Knight I had to be in this place! And that man certainly did come from 'an endless time and a countless distance'. Which means...

“That man, Bertorion is the actual Blue Knight!!”

The true identity of Forthorthe's legendary hero, Reios Fatra Bertorion was a slightly dim looking youth from Earth.

Afterword

Long time no see everyone, it's the author Takehaya. This time I have much more space for the afterword than last time.

Only three months have passed since the last volume, and I'm sure you can understand the reason why. That's right, the invaders don't appear in this volume. Because this is more of a side-story I and the publishing department wanted to publish this volume as soon as possible.

This volume covers what Koutarou and Clan were doing when they disappeared in the previous volume. However I couldn't fit all of that into a single volume, so this side-story will get a sequel. What follows will be revealed in volume 8.5.

With some more room in this afterword, I wanted to cover some hardships I had while writing this volume.

The first problem was the timing. I can only write about this now, but I was wondering when I should release the contents of this volume since the very first volume. If a story without most of the established characters is released before you can get used to the story and characters, there would be a lot of confusion. That said, there was no guarantee that this series would continue for long. In the end I decided to release this at a timing that felt more natural. Fortunately, thanks to the support of all you readers, this risky volume was able to be safely published. So while relieved, I am also grateful for all the support. I will continue working hard so please continue to support me in the future.

The second problem was how to treat the timeslip to the past. Is there only one true history, or does it branch off like a tournament board? If it branched off, what were the conditions for that? It was necessary to define that for the convenience of the story.

There was actually something that I had been wondering about for a while. That was that once you time slipped into the past, would you actually be able to come back to the same time and place?

The reason for that is that if a person was sent back in time in a timeslip, the moment that person appeared in the past the mass of the planet would increase by a single person. And the change in gravity from that would slightly alter the universe. So having slightly changed the history of the universe, returning from that, one would return to a slightly different world. Of course, that change might be so minute that the time traveler wouldn't notice it. Though minute, a change is a change, while everything might look the same all your friends and family would actually be different people. And if parallel universes existed it would become even more complicated, as the time traveler would still be absent from the world they came from. Because of that, story composition is quite problematic.

That's why I thought about it for a long time and decided that while parallel universes existed, they could also rejoin. So if there was a minor change, history would return to normal right away. As a result, history wouldn't look like a tournament board, but like knitting. In that structure, if a time traveler changed history, they could return to their own world if they tried hard enough. They would be able to meet their friends and family again.

I reached this conclusion just before my head was about to explode. Thanks to that, I was able to sort this story out, but I believe I'll come across similar philosophical problems in future works. I'm both scared and looking forward to it; creating a story is quite hard.

I've run out of room, I felt like I had more space, but it ran out right away. It's time to bid farewell this time.

I'd like to thank everyone helping me at the editorial department, Poco-san, my illustrator, my friends that give me advice and all the readers who bought this book.

I pray for all the people affected by the recent earthquake and tsunami.

March, 2011 Takeyama

(六畳間の侵略者！？ 7.5) **Rokujouma no Shinryakusha!?** 7.5 - **The Blue Knight and The Silver Princess side story**
Autor: Takehaya
Illustrator: Poco
Translator: Warnis
PDF: Evoeden

Translator's Notes and References

1. A phenomenon where people travel through time via unknown means